

# Govt consults public on Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan

## Stronger emphasis on diversification, Hengqin

Tony Wong

The local government starts a public consultation today on its drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, with stronger emphasis on Macau's appropriate economic diversification and its participation in the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Details of the public consultation were announced by the Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPDR), the public entity tasked with the drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, during a press conference at its headquarters in Taipa yesterday.

According to yesterday's press conference, Macau's appropriate economic diversification and Hengqin's development make up over 25 percent of the plan's draft version announced yesterday.

### 11 sessions in 40 days

The public consultation is running for 40 days until June 28. The government has scheduled 11 sessions to gather opinions and suggestions from attendees about the 3rd Five-Year Plan and answer their

questions, comprising three sessions for members of the general public and eight sessions for representatives from different segments and sectors of civil society.

The three sessions for the general public will be held on June 5, 14 and 23 on the first basement floor of the Public Administration Building on Rua do Campo.

The public consultation document, available in Chinese and Portuguese, can be downloaded from the consultation's dedicated website (<https://www.dsepdr.gov.mo/comment>). Members of the public can submit their opinions and suggestions through various channels such as the consultation's dedicated website, the Macao One Account e-government app, and by email ([comment@dsepdr.gov.mo](mailto:comment@dsepdr.gov.mo)).

The Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) 3rd Five-Year Plan, officially known as 3rd Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030. The Macau government has underlined its commitment to aligning Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan

(2026-2030), the full version of which was published by the Central People's Government in March this year.

After assessing the opinions and suggestions gathered during the 40-day public consultation, the local government will draw up and publish the final version of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, a process scheduled to be completed within this year. Afterwards, the government will start implementing the plan.

The local government has now drafted the public consultation document, i.e., the draft version of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, after reviewing the results in the implementation of Macau's 2nd Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) while carrying out extensive surveys and research studies, according to yesterday's press conference.

DSEPDR Director Cheong Chok Man said during the press conference that the local government was able to complete 94 percent of all major tasks outlined by Macau's 2nd Five-Year Plan by the time the plan was concluded.

Continued on p.6



Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPDR) Director Cheong Chok Man addresses yesterday's press conference at the bureau's headquarters in Taipa. The press conference lasted 1.5 hours. - Photo: Tony Wong

# China-Russia ever-lasting friendship will enjoy even greater popular support: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China-Russia ever-lasting friendship will enjoy even greater popular support, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

Guo made the remarks at a regular news briefing when asked to comment on a survey, conducted by the Chinese and Russian sides of the Council of Education under the China-Russia Committee for Friendship, Peace and Development, on China-Russia youth friendship and cultural exchange among people aged between 18 and 35 in both countries.

A few days ago, the Global Opinion Research Center at Renmin University of China held a launch event for the survey report, noting that over 80 percent of those surveyed view China-

Russia relations as friendly.

"The survey is a true barometer of the public opinion in China and Russia. Its results reflect the height of bilateral relations and the hope for more exchanges between the young people," Guo said.

Noting that Russian President Vladimir Putin started his state visit to China last night, Guo voiced full confidence that under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and Putin, China-Russia ever-lasting friendship will enjoy even greater popular support.

The youth in both countries will join hands and inject fresh vitality into China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, he added. - Xinhua



Russian President Vladimir Putin waves upon arrival in Beijing last night for a state visit to China. At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, Putin is visiting China on May 19-20. - Xinhua

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### US-Nigeria airstrikes kill 175 IS fighters: Nigerian military

The Nigerian military said yesterday that joint airstrikes it launched with US forces at the weekend have killed 175 jihadists from the Islamic State (IS) group in Nigeria, including the group's global second-in-command. - Story on p. 10

### US police probing deadly mosque shooting as hate crime

Police are investigating a shooting in the US state of California as a hate crime after a pair of teenage gunmen killed three people at a mosque complex. - Story on p. 11

### Cuba warns of 'bloodbath' if US attacks; Washington adds sanctions

Cuba's leader warned on Monday of a "bloodbath" in the event of an American attack, while the US Treasury sanctioned Cuba's main intelligence agency and top leaders as tensions spiked between the arch-foes. - Story on p. 12

# Police arrest local woman for cheating Filipina in 'domestic helper job' ruse

Armindo Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a local woman for cheating a Filipina in a "domestic helper job" ruse last Thursday, PSP spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian said during a regular press conference on Monday.

Kong identified the suspect as a local Portuguese female surnamed Alves in her fifties, who claimed to be jobless. Kong also said that the victim is a woman in her twenties from the Philippines.

According to Kong, on February 10, the victim learnt through a friend that Alves was planning to hire a domestic helper.

The victim and her friend met Alves to talk about the job opportunity, Kong said, adding that during the meeting, Alves claimed that she would hire the Filipina but demanded a "processing fee" of 20,000 patacas from her.

Believing Alves, the victim handed over the amount, Kong said.

The three then proceeded to Taipa's Pac On district, purportedly to "complete the necessary paperwork", Kong said, adding that on the way, Alves handed 5,000 patacas to the victim's friend before she excused herself to go to the toilet, after which she failed to join the other two.

The PSP Immigration Department is located in Pac On.

Kong said that the victim's friend insisted that she hadn't had



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police on Monday shows PSP officers escorting the fraud suspect surnamed Alves to a local police station.

prior knowledge of the ruse and, therefore, returned the 5,000 patacas to the victim.

Kong did not reveal the gender and nationality of the victim's friend.

Both made multiple attempts to contact Alves but in vain, according to Kong. Suspecting they had been cheated, Kong said that they reported the matter to the Public Security Police, stating a loss of 15,000 patacas.

Based on CCTV footage, PSP

officers identified Alves and arrested her last Thursday in Avenida do Progresso in Taipa, Kong said, adding that under questioning Alves denied the allegations and refused to answer further questions.

Alves has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a possible fraud charge. ■

# Thai imported 'Shredded Pork Stick' found to contain excessive antioxidant

Armindo Neves

The Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that it has been informed by the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety that a certain brand of Shredded Pork Stick contains excessive antioxidant.

According to the statement, the bureau has closely been monitoring the matter and following up on it. It has instructed businesses to cease the supply and sale of products from the affected batches, and it has also urged the public to stop consuming the product, the statement said.

The problematic product involved is of the brand "Lim Jing Hieng" (林真香)\* originating from Thailand. It is described as "Shredded Pork Stick" with a net weight of 100 grams and a best before date of July 1, 2026, according to the statement.

A sample of the product was found to contain butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) at a level of 330 mg per kg, the statement said, exceeding the limit set by Macau's Standards on the Use of Food Additives in Foodstuffs.

Butylated hydroxytoluene is a common food antioxidant, the statement noted, adding that the levels of BHT detected in this sample, under normal consumption conditions, are generally not expected to have adverse

effects on public health. ■

\*Lim Jing Hieng is a famous, historic Thai heritage brand specialising in pork snacks. Its flagship shop is a major landmark in the heart of Chinatown on Yaowarat Road. The brand has been around for over 50 years and is a household name for tourists and locals alike looking for traditional Chinese-Thai meat souvenirs. – Gemini



This undated handout photo downloaded last night from the "MikoPlace" online supermarket shows the Lim Jing Hieng brand's "Shredded Pork Stick" product that was found to contain levels of antioxidant exceeding the legal limit. According to Gemini, MikoPlace is a specialised online supermarket and e-commerce platform that caters to international shoppers looking for authentic Hong Kong, Japanese, Taiwanese, and Korean groceries, snacks, beauty products, and household items.

# IAM launches 'Municipal Affairs in Service to the Public' webpage to strengthen public engagement

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement yesterday that it has launched a new dedicated webpage titled "Municipal Affairs in Service to the Public" to provide residents with easier access to municipal information and encourage greater public participation in urban governance.

According to the statement, the new webpage went online through IAM's official website and aims to serve as a people-orientated information platform covering a wide range of municipal services and developments.

The statement said that the initiative is intended to deepen the dissemination of governance information, improve the public's experience with municipal services and support the development of a more liveable Macau through refined and intelligent urban management.

Municipal services are closely connected to residents' daily lives and play a key role in enhancing the city's overall quality and living environment, the statement noted, adding that it has consistently adhered to a "people-centric" governance philosophy by responding to public needs, listening to community feedback and improving livelihood-related services.

The statement underlined that it has also continued to incorporate technological innovation into its operations to optimise administrative procedures and modernise the municipal management system through refined management and smarter services.

According to the statement, the new webpage will cover multiple areas related to daily life such as environmental cleanliness and hygiene, food safety supervision, market and vendor management, urban greening, ecological conservation, leisure area planning and the organisation of cultural and recreational activities.

The platform will also provide updates on policies, measures, future development plans and municipal work progress in a more systematic

and accessible manner, allowing residents to better understand ongoing projects and public services, the statement said, pointing out that the initiative is designed to enhance the openness, transparency and accessibility of municipal governance while creating a more convenient communication channel between authorities and the public.

The bureau said it will continue improving the content and functions of the new webpage while working alongside different sectors of society to advance urban governance and contribute towards the development of a modernised, sustainable and liveable Macau, the statement concluded.

The website will be available in traditional and simplified Chinese, Portuguese, and English. ■



This image released by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows its recently launched "Municipal Affairs in Service to the Public" available on the bureau's website.

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Affected areas: NO. 1 TO NO. 3 BECO DO BALACHÃ O; NO. 9 TO NO. 15 PÁ TIO DO BALACHÃ O; NO. 1 TO NO. 8 LARGO DA SURDEZ; NO. 1 TO NO. 17 TRAVESSA DO BALACHÃ O; NO. 4 TO NO. 6 BECO DO MISSÓ; NO. 3 TO NO. 5 BECO DO CRAVEIRO; NO. 1 TO NO. 26 CALÇ ADA DA ROCHA; NO. 1 TO NO. 8 BECO DO PORCO; NO. 1 TO NO. 9 TRAVESSA DO TUDUM; NO. 4 TO NO. 10 PÁ TIO DO MILHAFRE; NO. 10 TO NO. 41 CALÇ ADA DAS VERDADES; NO. 2 PÁ TIO DAS VERDADES; NO. 1 TO NO. 12 TRAVESSA DO PENEDO

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- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

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24°C~28°C

Source: SMG

# School of the Nations hosts INCLUSION Conference

**Khalel Vallo**

The School of the Nations (SON) in Taipa hosted its “INCLUSION Conference & Festival” yesterday, bringing together educators, advocates, athletes and community representatives to promote social inclusion and accessibility, while highlighting the importance of recognising the abilities and contributions of people with differing needs.

The event, held on the school campus, marked the first time the conference received sponsorship support from integrated resort operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment and We Can Dream Together Foundation. In his opening remarks, SON Director Vivek Nair described inclusion as a fundamental educational responsibility, referencing a quotation displayed around the campus: “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can alone cause it to reveal its treasures and enable mankind to benefit therefrom”.

Nair said the quotation reflects the school’s belief that every individual possesses unique value and potential, regardless of ability. “It refers not only to those individuals of capacity, but it implies that all are mines rich in gems,” he said. “The role of education is critical to enable humanity to benefit”.

Nair noted the school’s commitment to inclusion led to the creation of a special education programme alongside its mainstream curriculum, stressing that yesterday’s conference aimed not only to discuss inclusion, but also to celebrate the achievements of individuals with differing needs.

In his speech, Nair shared the story of a student from the school’s mainstream



School of the Nations (SON) in Taipa Director Vivek Nair (left), Charity Association of Macau Business Readers President Paulo A. Azevedo (centre) and Vice President Business Readers José Carlos Matias address yesterday’s “INCLUSION Conference & Festival” on the school’s campus yesterday morning.

programme who volunteered with a girl with severe physical and intellectual disabilities as part of a community service initiative.

According to Nair, the student reflected on the perseverance shown by the girl while attempting to catch a ball during their session together, eventually realising how little effort she herself sometimes invested in her own work. “I humbly suggest that this is an example of what we all gather here to promote”, he said, adding that “we are here to advance the cause of true inclusion”.

Nair also thanked the organisers, teachers and volunteers involved in preparing for the conference over the past few months.

Addressing the ceremony, Paulo A. Azevedo, president of the Charity Association of Macau Business Readers, reflected on his own experiences of feeling excluded earlier



in life and stressed the importance of creating spaces where people feel understood and accepted. “We all speak the same language,” Azevedo said, referring to the connections built through sports, workshops and community interaction during the conference. Meanwhile, José Carlos Matias, vice president of the association, described inclusion as a process of cultivating connections, awareness and advocacy. “We are all ambassadors of this great cause”, he said.

Azevedo and Matias are veteran local Portuguese journalists.

Speaking to the media following the opening ceremony, Nair said that Macau had made significant progress in inclusion over the past 25 years, particularly in educational support. “I used to think of them as challenges, now I think of them as opportunities”, he said, referring to the development of



inclusion programmes in Macau. Nair noted that the School of the Nations currently operates Macau’s only English-language special education programme and receives support from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), including funding assistance for local students, teacher recruitment and professional training, adding that while progress has been made, public education remains one of the biggest challenges to achieving greater inclusion.

“The more people recognise that people with differing needs are not just people who want to take, but who have something to give, the more accepting they will be”, Nair said, stressing the need for greater employment opportunities for people with differing needs after graduation, calling for broader societal efforts to create more inclusive workplaces and career pathways. ■

– Photos: Khalel Vallo

## Macao Int’l Children’s Arts Festival to expand: committee



Cultural Development Consultative Committee Acting President and Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man (right) and committee member Ieng Weng Fat look on after the committee’s regular closed-door meeting at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

**Armindo Neves**

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man and committee member Ieng Weng Fat announced yesterday that the Macao International Children’s Arts Festival will be expanded this year.

The government-appointed Cultural Development Consultative Committee held this year’s second plenary meeting yesterday at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape. The meeting was chaired by Leong in her capacity as the acting president of the committee.

Leong introduced the preparations for the upcoming festival alongside updates on the cultural and artistic activities being held at Anim’Arte NAM VAN, noting that the latter had attracted around 6,000 participants so far.

Leong said the bureau hopes that these kinds of community events can be expanded into other outdoor spaces under its management. This would provide residents with more venues to engage with culture and the arts during public holidays.

According to Ieng, building on the experience of the previous two editions,

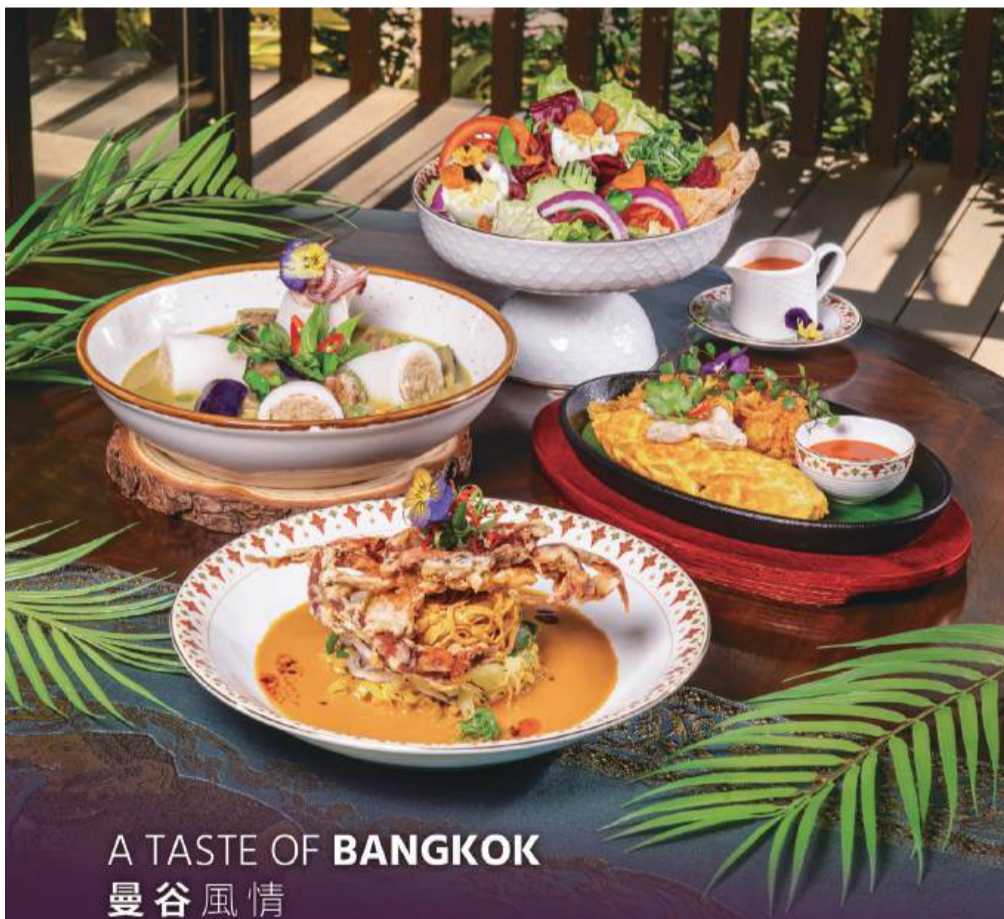
the festival will increase in scale. Around 1,000 programmes are expected to attract about 300,000 participants, Ieng said.

At the end of the first quarter of this year, Macau had a population of 688,100, according to official demographics.

Leong added that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Macao International Children’s Arts Festival will run from July to August. While the framework and types of activities will remain similar to previous editions – including performances, art exhibitions, film screenings, family art camps, and a children’s bookshop – the number of places available for the camps will be increased.

The organisers also intend to screen films in libraries and bookshops, rather than limiting screenings to traditional cinemas or outdoor squares, Leong said.

Meanwhile, Ieng spoke about fellow committee members’ feedback regarding the “Read Macau – National Reading Campaign Week”. He quoted committee members as saying that they believe that promoting reading across different levels will help gradually popularise reading among the general public. ■



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# UM Symphony Orchestra earns warm reception at debut concert

Interview and review by William Chan

The University of Macau Symphony Orchestra (UMSO) held its debut concert, “A Night at the Symphony,” on campus last Tuesday. The programme featured Verdi’s *Aida*, Ravel’s *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (“Pavane for a Dead Princess”), Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, and Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1*, Gershwin’s *An American in Paris Suite*, as well as Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley’s *Pure Imagination*.

Formed just last year, UMSO is the university’s first symphony orchestra. Although the university does not offer a music major, it has for years trained amateur students under professional music teachers, allowing them to learn music and perform as an ensemble. As a fully instrumented symphony orchestra, UMSO currently has around 100 members from different disciplines across the university.

Beyond the music, the orchestra prepared specific visuals and lighting for each piece. For example, *Peer Gynt Suite* featured four AI-generated oil paintings representing the respective four movements of the piece. The *1812 Overture*, which depicts France’s ill-fated invasion of Russia, was accompanied by historical paintings illustrating the story – from Napoléon’s planning of the invasion, to the battle itself, and finally to the French defeat and the entry of anti-French coalition forces (including Russians) into Paris.

Conductor Ng Sa frequently briefed the audience about the pieces, giving many details that even I, as a player, did not know. For instance, despite the worldwide success of the *1812 Overture*, Tchaikovsky himself did not like the piece, finding it loud and noisy. During Ravel’s and Gershwin’s pieces, Ng also noted an interesting story between the two brilliant composers: Gershwin so admired Ravel that he sought

him out in Paris, an encounter that bore influence upon the tune played in *An American in Paris*. Ravel, after hearing Gershwin’s music, was astonished and refused to teach him, commenting: “Why become a second-rate Ravel when you are already a first-rate Gershwin?”

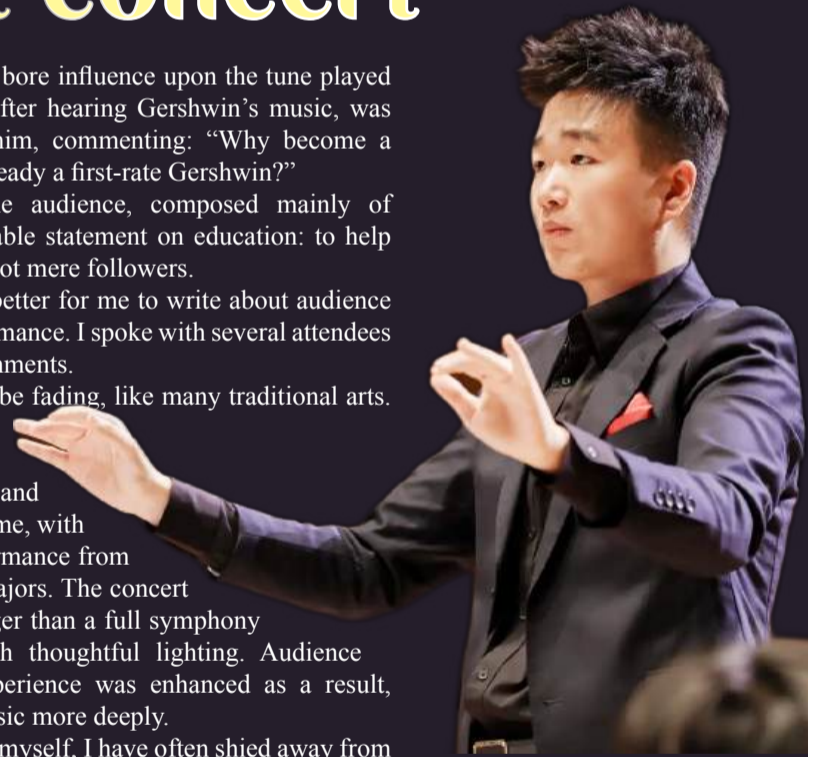
His words resonated with the audience, composed mainly of professors and students, as a relatable statement on education: to help students become their best selves, not mere followers.

Since I was also a player, it is better for me to write about audience feedback rather than my own performance. I spoke with several attendees and received generally positive comments.

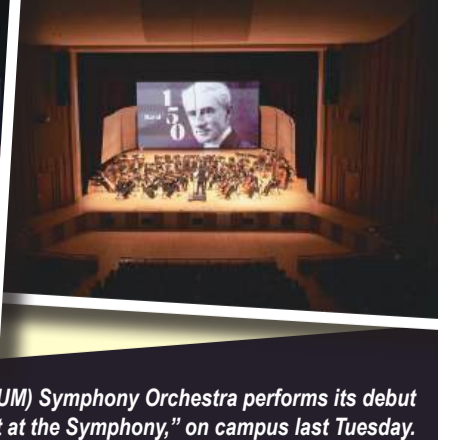
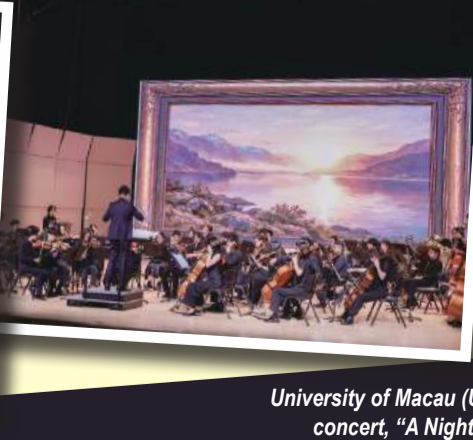
Classical music is often said to be fading, like many traditional arts. Most people I talked to remarked on the strength of the repertoire:

it was familiar, easy to listen to, and concise. Plus, the music is wholesome, with most people surprised by the performance from the students, who are non-music majors. The concert ran just over an hour –slightly longer than a full symphony –and combined good visuals with thoughtful lighting. Audience members felt that the overall experience was enhanced as a result, allowing them to appreciate the music more deeply.

As a classically trained amateur myself, I have often shied away from inviting friends to concerts because I have sometimes found them getting bored. Tuesday’s concert, from what I heard, was anything but boring. It proved that classical music, when presented with creativity and heart, can still excite a modern audience.



Ng Sa conducts at UM N2 Hall last Tuesday. – Photos: Leong Wai Keong, Tang Chao, Zhang Boyu



University of Macau (UM) Symphony Orchestra performs its debut concert, “A Night at the Symphony,” on campus last Tuesday.

# Booth registration for 2026 Sands Shopping Carnival opens

Rui Pastorin

Booth registration for the upcoming 2026 Sands Shopping Carnival is now open, welcoming the participation of local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Sands Retailers and inviting exhibitor registrations for a free booth at Macau's largest sale event until 6 p.m. on May 29.

Marking its seventh consecutive year and again set to feature a variety of brands, the free-admission fair, a signature annual event in Macau, will be held from July 23 to 26 at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

Over 580 booths are expected this year across various themed zones from "household products, gourmet & wine, food court, culture and creative, Sands retailers, Macau specialties

& souvenirs, and family fun and sports experiences", according to a statement from the integrated resort operator on Monday.

A "major business and promotional platform" for SMEs, community partners, and Sands retailers, the shopping carnival debuted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, with cumulative attendance now exceeding 640,000, while 4,000 complimentary booths have been provided over the years, according to the statement.

"By offering an extended business and promotion platform, the carnival has helped local SMEs and Sands retailers broaden their customer base and market exposure, further promoting Macau's consumer brands", the

statement said, adding that it has "successfully stimulated local and visitor spending in Macau".

The fair will be open from noon to 10 p.m. daily during the dates, with the first day of the four-day run designated as an invitation-only preview, while the remaining three days are open to the public.

Free booth registration can be done on <https://1ticks.com/event/ssc2026-SME-application>, while more information is also available on <https://en.sandsresortsmacao.com/sands-lifestyle/events/sands-shopping-carnival-2026.html>, the Sands Cares Facebook page, and by calling 2855 5000 or emailing [info@macexpo.com.mo](mailto:info@macexpo.com.mo).

Complimentary parking and free shuttle buses will also be available. ■



This undated handout photo taken and provided by integrated resort operator Sands China on Monday shows an overhead view of a previous edition of the Sands China Shopping Carnival.

## GEG celebrates Galaxy Macau's 15th Anniversary

Bottle cap mosaic initiative breaks IR's 4th world record



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) Chairman Francis Lui Yiu Tung (right) receives the world record certificate for the "Most Contributions to a Bottle Cap Mosaic in 24 Hours" during the ceremony at Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in Cotai.

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort (IR) operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) commemorated the 15th Anniversary of Galaxy Macau on Friday at Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in Cotai, during which the company hosted a celebratory event along with its "Long Service Award Ceremony" that recognised over 9,500 staff with 10 or more years of service.

The company also recently commemorated the milestone by organising a world record attempt themed "Together We Build", where 3,888 staff created a massive bottle cap mosaic from May 13 to 14, setting a new world record for "Most Contributions to a Bottle Cap Mosaic in 24 Hours" and marking the fourth time that the company achieved a world record title, according to a GEG statement on Friday.

The achievement was verified that same morning by the world record official adjudicator, in the presence of Caritas Macau Coordination Manager Joanna Wong

Pui Kei and Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Services Coordination Office (SKH) Service Coordinator Anny Yip Mei Kun.

A certificate was presented that day to GEG Chairman Francis Lui Yiu Tung.

During his speech, the statement quoted Lui as saying: "With nearly half of our team members having served for over 10 years, and many for more than 15 or even 20 years, this enduring commitment reflects the deep trust and strong sense of belonging that have enabled our people to grow alongside GEG".

Lui, the statement said, also highlighted GEG's continued efforts to enrich the development of its integrated resort, earning multiple international accolades. The statement added that GEG has hosted more than 1,000 high-profile entertainment, sports, cultural, and MICE events since 2023.

The event was attended by over 600 GEG executives and staff, alongside officiating government and company representatives, according to a statement issued that day. ■

## University of Notre Dame Folk Choir to perform at USJ Sunday

William Chan

The University of Notre Dame\* Folk Choir will present "Drawn Back to the Table", a musical adaptation of the Passion and Resurrection, on May 24 at 8 p.m. The performance is scheduled to take place in the Fátima Centenary Auditorium at the University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) Ilha Verde Campus.

Created by JJ Wright and Tristan Cooley, the music-drama is based on biblical scripture, religious tradition, and a collaborative development process between Notre Dame students and professional artists. The narrative is structurally framed around the biblical "Road to Emmaus,"\*\* utilising a variety of musical styles and theatrical expressions to explore themes of suffering, injustice, love, and humility.

The Folk Choir serves as one of the principal liturgical choirs for the University of Notre Dame, performing weekly during the academic year at the 12 p.m. liturgy in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. The ensemble comprises students from a wide range of academic disciplines who are brought together by a shared

interest in music and the exploration of their faith. Following the tenets of Blessed Basil Moreau\*\*\*, the group aims to connect the hearts and minds of both its members and the congregations they serve through sacred song. Notably, J.J. Wright, trained as a jazz improviser and is passionate about sacred music; he is also the director of the choir.

To register, scan the QR code on the poster; and for more information, visit: [www.usj.edu.mo/en/event/notre-dame-folk-choir/](http://www.usj.edu.mo/en/event/notre-dame-folk-choir/) ■

\* The University of Notre Dame du Lac (known simply as Notre Dame) is a highly prestigious, private Catholic research university located in Notre Dame, Indiana, just north of South Bend. Founded in 1842 by Father Edward Sorin of the Congregation of Holy Cross, it has grown into one of the premier higher education institutions in the United States. - Gemini

\*\* "The Road to Emmaus" is a story from the Gospel of Luke (chapter 24, verses 13-35) about the resurrected Jesus appearing to two of his followers on the very day of his resurrection. They don't recognise

him at first, but he explains the Scriptures to them, and they finally realise who he is when he breaks bread with them. - DeepSeek

\*\*\* Blessed Basil Anthony Marie Moreau, C.S.C. (1799-1873) was a French priest best known as the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross (the religious order of priests and brothers that founded the University of Notre Dame). - Gemini



Poster promoting the upcoming performance "Drawn Back to the Table" at University of Saint Joseph (USJ).

## Gongbei Customs seizes 67 hermit crabs hidden in handbag

Armando Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers at Gongbei checkpoint seized 67 hermit crabs on April 17.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the checkpoint's inspection hall noticed that a female traveller walking through the "green channel" was exhibiting a "nervous expression and evasive gaze".

In the statement, customs officers identified the traveller as a female from the Chinese mainland surnamed Zhong.

They stopped her for inspection, the statement said, adding that customs officers discovered 67 hermit crabs were concealed in her handbag that she was attempting to smuggle from Macau to Zhuhai.

Subsequent identification by the Gongbei Customs Technical Center confirmed that the hermit crabs were of the species *Coenobita perlatus* (commonly known as the strawberry hermit crab).

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, in accordance with laws and regulations, bringing

live animals and plants into the Chinese mainland without approval is prohibited. Those who violate these provisions will be held legally responsible by the authorities. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows hermit crabs seized by its officers at Gongbei checkpoint on April 17.

## Govt consults public on Macau's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan

Continued from p.1

### 6 key pillars

Cheong said the local government has drafted Macau's third five-year plan based on six key pillars, namely putting into practice the spirit of President Xi Jinping's various important speeches made during his inspection visit to Macau in December 2024; aligning the local plan with the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and the respective development plans of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), Guangdong Province, and Hong Kong; implementing the policies and measures outlined by the candidacy platform of Sam Hou Fai when he ran in the chief executive election in 2024; connecting the current plan with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Five-Year Plan; adopting a problem-orientated approach; and outlining practicable goals.

Cheong underlined that the government has drafted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan in line with eight principles, namely improving the MSAR's executive-led system; advancing reform and innovation; promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification; delivering people-orientated governance; staying committed to openness and inclusiveness; integrating the MSAR into and serving the nation's overall development; strengthening coordination between different public entities; and adopting a problem-orientated approach.

### 8 major goals

Cheong said that the local government aims to achieve eight major goals through the upcoming implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, namely fully putting into practice the central authorities' holistic approach to national security; enhancing governance effectiveness; making new and concrete achievements in its appropriate economic diversification drive; advancing the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin; achieving significant results in the integrated development of Macau's education, sci-tech, and

talent cultivation; safeguarding and improving residents' well-being; making important progress in building a beautiful and smart Macau; and better integrating into and serving the nation's overall development.

### 10 part, 36 chapters

According to Cheong, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan is divided into 10 parts. Eight of the 10 parts lay out various tasks, measures, and targets in the eight major goals, while the first part outlines the background for drafting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan. The final part lays out various measures aiming to ensure that the government will be able to achieve the tasks and targets listed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan.

The 10 parts comprise a total of 36 chapters.

Cheong also underlined that the local government will only lay out development goals and targets in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan that it has concluded it will be able to achieve by 2030. Only practicable tasks and targets will be listed in the plan, he said.

According to the draft version of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, which was announced yesterday, the local government aims for the value added (output) of all non-gaming sectors to account for around 60 percent of Macau's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2030, an increase from the 56.7 percent in 2024.

Cheong underlined that the government does not aim to reduce the output generated by the gaming sector. Instead, the government aims for the gaming sector to operate and develop in a healthy and orderly manner.

Cheong also noted that the aim of developing Hengqin is to provide Macau with more space and opportunities for its appropriate economic diversification.

Cheong also noted that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan outlines the local government's work on safeguarding national security in its second part, following the first part that outlines the background for drafting the plan. He said that ensuring national security is the fundamental basis guaranteeing Macau's sustainable development. ■

## Lai Ching-te's 2 years in office plagued by failures, a record of misconduct

### Analysis

BEIJING – As Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te's two-year tenure has been plagued by failures, skepticism and criticism over his performance has intensified, spanning issues from cross-strait tensions and political infighting to economic imbalances and livelihood concerns.

Recent opinion polls have shown declining approval ratings for the authorities led by Lai. Some surveys indicate that public dissatisfaction with his performance has exceeded 50 percent for five consecutive months, while trust in him has fallen to as low as 36 percent.

### SECESSIONIST STANCE STRAINS CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

Relations between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, an issue central to every leader of Taiwan, have further deteriorated during Lai's first two years in office, with the mainland repeatedly criticizing him for advancing secessionist agenda in pursuit of so-called "Taiwan independence."

The Taiwan question is left over from a full-blown civil war fought between forces led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) about eight decades ago. In 1949, the remnants of the defeated KMT retreated to Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China was founded under the leadership of the CPC.

The unresolved civil war and foreign interference have left the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in a prolonged state of political confrontation. However, the fact that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory has never changed.

Over the past two years, Lai and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities have repeatedly challenged this basic fact and the political foundation underpinning cross-strait relations.

From reviving the "two states" theory and distorting United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 to claiming that "the People's Republic of China has no right to represent Taiwan," and openly whitewashing Japanese colonial rule on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Taiwan's restoration to China, Lai's secessionist rhetoric has grown increasingly radical.

Among the most controversial moves were Lai's characterization of the mainland as a "hostile external force" when introducing 17 strategies aimed at countering what he described as threats facing the island, as well as proposals for massive arms purchases from the United States.

Lai and the DPP authorities have also been accused of abusing administrative and judicial resources to suppress political parties, organizations and individuals advocating cross-strait exchanges and reunification, while pressuring Taiwan businesses and investors to decouple from the mainland market.

Lai's policies and actions have fueled growing public concern over the possibility of conflict across the

Strait, as reflected in multiple opinion surveys. Even a poll conducted in April by the pro-DPP online outlet My Formosa found that 22.4 percent of respondents said they would accept peaceful reunification in order to avoid a cross-strait conflict.

Some international media outlets have also reported a growing trend among Taiwan residents to move assets and family members overseas amid rising uncertainty.

### POLITICAL INFIGHTING DEEPENS

Under Lai's leadership, Taiwan in 2025 witnessed what critics described as a sweeping "recall campaign" – two rounds of recall votes held in July and August targeting a total of 31 opposition KMT legislators.

The DPP currently holds 51 seats in Taiwan's 113-seat legislature, less than those held by opposition parties. Observers argued that although the recall campaign appeared to have been initiated by "civil groups," it was in fact orchestrated by the Lai authorities in an attempt to overturn the DPP's legislative disadvantage through recalls and subsequent by-elections.

Meanwhile, observers say Taiwan's democracy and rule of law have deteriorated as the DPP authorities crack down on political opponents and dissenting voices. Because green is the DPP's campaign color, such tactics have been labeled by people on the island as "green authoritarianism."

Judicial investigations have targeted individuals opposing separatism and criticizing DPP policies. Public servants have faced heightened scrutiny over mainland-related affairs, while restrictive measures have been imposed on cross-strait cultural exchanges and discriminatory policies adopted toward mainland spouses of Taiwan residents.

A chilling effect has emerged on the island where only one political stance, which is for "Taiwan independence," is deemed acceptable and free from suppression and intimidation.

The DPP-backed recall campaigns ultimately ended in overwhelming defeat, a result widely interpreted as reflecting public fatigue with political polarization and confrontation, as well as a desire for peace, development and expanded cross-strait exchanges and cooperation.

### ECONOMIC CONCERNS PERSIST

Despite headline figures showing economic growth and rising per capita GDP, economists and commentators have pointed to deep-rooted structural problems in Taiwan's economy, including wage stagnation, soaring housing prices and overreliance on the semiconductor sector.

Traditional industries and small businesses continue to face mounting pressure, while nearly 70 percent of employees reportedly earn below-average wages. Concerns over labor shortages, energy security and demographic decline have also weighed on the island's long-

term economic outlook.

Although industrial leaders and economists have repeatedly called for economic restructuring and industrial upgrading, Lai has failed to introduce effective measures to address these challenges.

Many campaign promises made during Lai's election bid, including initiatives related to housing and healthcare, have advanced slowly. According to a KMT legislator, only two of the 227 policy initiatives proposed during his campaign have been fully implemented.

### "SELLING OUT" TAIWAN

Since taking office, Lai has encountered a series of setbacks in his overseas engagements. His attempt to transit through the United States during a planned trip was reportedly rejected by Washington. Later, after relevant countries declined to grant flight permits for his chartered aircraft, he was forced into what critics derided as a "smuggling-style" visit to Eswatini, turning the trip into a public embarrassment.

Despite repeated setbacks, Lai has shown little sign of abandoning his strategy of seeking foreign backing for political leverage, a course that has come at the expense of the people of Taiwan.

The DPP authorities have proposed a special arms procurement package from the United States with a price tag of 1.25 trillion New Taiwan dollars (US\$40 billion), funds that should instead have been directed toward boosting the local economy and improving public welfare.

They have also been criticized for failing to respond when key industries, including semiconductor giant TSMC, faced pressure to relocate operations to the United States, raising concerns over industrial hollowing-out in Taiwan.

Moreover, a so-called reciprocal trade arrangement with the United States would permit the import of sprouted potatoes containing toxic solanine, provided the sprouted portions were removed.

From public resources and corporate interests to food safety concerns affecting ordinary citizens, critics argue that little appears exempt from political bargaining by the DPP.

Lai's willingness to sacrifice the well-being of the Taiwan people and the island's economic prospects for external support serves his secessionist agenda.

Yet it seems to be more like his wishful thinking and self-deception. The signal sent in US President Donald Trump's latest remarks concerning Taiwan was clear.

"We're not looking to have somebody say, 'Let's go independent because the United States is backing us,'" Trump said in an interview following his state visit to China last week.

The direction of cross-strait relations is becoming increasingly clear, with reunification the only option for Taiwan. No matter how hard the Lai authorities try to stir up trouble, his secessionist fantasy will ultimately be shattered. – Xinhua



Tourists visit Qu Yuan Temple in Zigui County, Hubei Province, yesterday, the 16<sup>th</sup> China Tourism Day. Qu Yuan (c. 340 BCE – 278 BCE) was a poet and aristocrat in the State of Chu during the Warring States period. He is known for his patriotism and contributions to classical poetry and verses. He is also remembered in connection to the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival. – Xinhua

## Scientists unveil young pulsar's origin in galactic halo

### Analysis

URUMQI – Chinese astronomers have unveiled the mysterious origins of a young pulsar located in the Milky Way's halo, providing compelling observational evidence for the study of such objects' formation.

The study, conducted by a team from the Xinjiang Astronomical Observatory (XAO) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was recently published in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

By utilizing long-term observational data from China's Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST), also known as the "China Sky Eye," and the 26-meter Nanshan Radio Telescope, the team tracked minute changes in the position of the young pulsar, named PSR J1740+1000. Combining this with its distance, they calculated its spatial velocity to be  $329 \pm 80$  km/s.

Based on this high velocity, researchers speculate that this young pulsar was born directly in the galactic halo. It is likely the offspring of a "runaway" OB star – a massive star that was violently ejected from its native environment during a dramatic cosmic event.

In addition to tracing its origins, the team made a groundbreaking discovery in the pulsar's radio signals. By combining data from FAST and Australia's Parkes radio telescope,

they identified multi-layered adjacent scintillation arc structures in the pulsar's secondary spectrum for the first time.

Further analysis suggests that these scintillation arcs likely originated from ionized structures on an astronomical unit scale within the pulsar's wind nebula (PWN).

According to Yao Jumei, an associate researcher at the XAO, a PWN is a plasma region formed by the interaction between the pulsar's high-speed particle flow and its surrounding environment.

She added that the findings indicate that the micro-scale structures of these nebulae play a dominant role in the formation of scintillation and can significantly affect the propagation of radio signals.

Pulsars are rapidly rotating neutron stars formed from the collapse of massive stars after they die. Traditionally, scientists believed that these objects are born in the Milky Way's disk, where stars are densely packed, rather than in its sparse outer halo.

This research not only provides key observational evidence for the origin of young pulsars in the galactic halo but also opens up new pathways for using pulsar signals to detect circumstellar and interstellar environments. – Xinhua

## Putin arrives in Beijing for state visit



In this pool photograph distributed by the Russian state agency Sputnik, Russian President Vladimir Putin (center, right) is welcomed by Foreign Minister Wang Yi (center, left) and other officials upon his arrival at Beijing Capital Airport in Beijing last night. – Xinhua

BEIJING – Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Beijing last night for a state visit to China.

At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Putin is visiting China from yesterday to today. This is Putin's 25<sup>th</sup> visit to China. The two presidents will exchange views on bilateral relations, cooperation in various

fields, and international and regional issues of mutual interest, according to China's foreign ministry.

This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty

of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.

The two sides will take this opportunity to continue deepening and elevating relations between China and Russia, so as to inject more stability and positive energy into the world, a foreign ministry spokesman said in Beijing.

– Xinhua

## Riding AI boom, NW China emerges as key computing hub

### Analysis

URUMQI – A new kind of hubs are emerging in the landscape of energy-rich northwest China. Instead of oil derricks, these centers are filled with rows of server racks.

Inside a 200-square-meter room at the Tianshan Smart Valley Advanced Computing Cluster in the city of Hami, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, hundreds of servers hum day and night. In just over a year, the likes of telecom giants, cloud computing service providers and tech firms have moved into this lesser-known city.

"Since March, we have had companies visiting almost every day for talks," said Paruq Yehya, head of a local digital development bureau. "Three clients are vying for one server company's computing power."

This frenzy reflects a shift: China's energy-rich northwest is riding the artificial intelligence (AI) boom to become a cost-effective computing hub.

### NEW DRAW CARDS

AI's soaring electricity demand has made Xinjiang and neighboring provinces such as Gansu attractive destinations for AI firms.

With abundant solar and wind reserves, Xinjiang offers green power at roughly one-third the price of coastal industrial electricity. Operating costs for a computing company in Hami are more than 40 percent lower than in the east of China. In Gansu's Qingyang city, one of the northwestern region's flagship computing hubs, a branch of telecom

giant China Mobile has revealed that monthly savings can reach four million yuan (about US\$ 585,000).

The region's cooler climate and cheaper land add to the appeal, lowering air-conditioning and operational costs below those of first-tier eastern cities.

For these computing centers, the core mission is to convert green power into computing power, via AI training and reasoning, resulting in tokens, the smallest unit of information processing in AI models.

"Just as oil is the lifeblood of industry, tokens are the most fundamental fuel for AI development," said Tang Shuheng, head of the Xinjiang International Integrated Supercomputing Center.

Major AI models based in eastern cities process reasoning requests on servers located in the northwest. Some of these requests serve overseas business in North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific. The clients of these AI model providers pay for token consumption, and the resulting revenue covers electricity, wages and equipment costs. In this way, token flows contribute directly to local economy.

In Qingyang alone, more than 500 AI-related firms had been set up by 2025, generating US\$1.28 billion in revenue and creating job opportunities, local authorities said.

National policy is accelerating the shift. A national strategy to relocate data processing from China's crowded coastal cities to its energy-rich western interior has gained momentum. In 2026, the

concept of "computing power and electricity synergy" made its debut in China's central government work report, and earlier this month, several departments released an action plan, setting a 2030 goal to significantly improve clean energy supply security for AI computing facilities and AI application in the energy sector.

Besides low cost, reliability and speed also matter. Upgraded networks have cut latency from Qingyang to Beijing or Shanghai to under 15 milliseconds, "about one-10<sup>th</sup> of the time it takes for a person to blink," said Yao Zhiping, an expert at a local data tech firm.

The northwest is also a testing ground for domestic chips. Huawei and other homegrown AI chips are now deployed at scale. At a computing center in Qingyang, a massive Enflame cluster successfully handled a peak-season surge of billions of image requests for photo-editing app Meitu's AI virtual try-on during the 2026 Chinese New Year holiday in February.

### DIGITAL SILK ROAD

More than China's energy backyard, the northwest has become an AI hub, with its computing power being exported westward.

Many Central Asian countries lack large-scale computing facilities but face urgent data processing demand in sectors such as satellite remote sensing, agriculture and energy infrastructure inspection. The computing power center in Xinjiang will function as a "digital post station" – satellite data arrives

via dedicated links and reaches customers in tailor-made services after being processed by AI models.

Tang, the Xinjiang computing center's head, said the facility will enable high-precision monitoring of the China-Kazakhstan oil pipelines and cut the warning time to 15 minutes should pipeline deformation, even tiny, occurs. Meanwhile, a satellite-linked AI crop farming system, supported by the Xinjiang center, is expected to help boost wheat yields and cut fertilizer use in Kazakhstan.

"Our goal is to move tech cooperation from one-sided output to a model where both sides benefit and win together," Tang added. The center has already signed agreements with partners from Kazakhstan and other countries to set up joint labs, providing image interpretation and data analysis to empower local industries.

### CHALLENGES REMAIN

However, not all workloads can move west. Web access, e-commerce and online gaming, which demand extremely low latency, have to stay in the east.

From Hami to Chongqing in China's southwest, network latency is about 50 milliseconds, exceeding the 30-millisecond threshold for real-time uses like autonomous driving and telemedicine. In addition, information infrastructure in Hami still lags behind coastal regions, while talent is scarce.

"Right now it is something like machines 'waiting for' people," Paruq Yehya said, adding that equipment has arrived, but staff with expertise

in tech, operations and the market are not in place. Rapid construction of large-scale computing centers also strains local equipment supply chains and logistics.

Still, the future looks promising. A Morgan Stanley report earlier this year predicted that data centers in China's far-flung regions will contribute 2.4 gigawatts of new orders in 2026, further increasing to 3.3 gigawatts in 2027, accounting for about 70 percent of new orders.

Power shortages are now a headache for computing hubs worldwide. In Virginia, the United States, dense data center concentration raises residential electricity bills greatly. While in Ireland, data centers have consumed 22 percent of national power.

China, which ranks second globally in computing power scale, is pursuing a more sustainable path featuring cheap green power and domestic chips. These advantages grow more pronounced as business insiders say the future AI race will favor greater scale, lower costs, and greener computing supply. The country's northwestern region is set to play a pivotal role.

Many cities that once served as oases on the ancient Silk Road, like Kashgar in Xinjiang, have followed the path of Hami and Qingyang, developing themselves into AI computing hubs.

They have become a microcosm of China's broader push, namely high-quality development driven not by raw materials, but by data and intelligence. – Xinhua

## Thailand cuts visa-free stays, citing crime by foreigners

BANGKOK – Thailand is drastically cutting the length of visa-free stays for tourists from more than 90 countries in an effort to curb crime involving foreign nationals, officials said yesterday.

Tourism is vital to the Southeast Asian nation's economy, but foreign arrivals are yet to return to their pre-COVID highs.

A recent series of high-profile arrests of foreigners has included cases linked to drug offences, sex trafficking and foreigners operating businesses such as hotels and schools without proper permits.

Under Thailand's current tourism scheme, travellers from more than 90 countries – including Europe's 29-nation Schengen

area, the United States, Israel and several South American countries – are eligible to visit for up to 60 days without a visa.

Thailand's cabinet approved reducing visa-free stays for travellers from those countries yesterday, Tourism Minister Surasak Phanchaoenworakul told reporters in Bangkok.

The new visa-free duration would be decided on a country-by-country basis, with most foreign nationals granted stays of up to 30 days, while some could receive only 15 days, Surasak said.

Tourists will be able to renew visas once by visiting an immigration office, a government spokeswoman told AFP.

"The 60 days was automatic but the renewal will be decided by the officer and tourists will have to explain why they are staying longer," she said.

Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow said last week that the plan to reduce visa-free stays was part of a crackdown on transnational crime.

Thailand was not targeting any specific country, he said, but rather individuals abusing the visa system by committing crimes in the country.

Tourists provided "benefits, such as boosting the economy, but the current scheme has allowed some people to exploit it", government spokesperson Rachada Dhanadirek told reporters yesterday.

The visa-free period was previously capped at 30 days but was extended to 60 in July 2024 as part of government efforts to boost tourism and the economy.

Tourism accounts for more than 10 percent of Thailand's GDP, although visitor numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Foreign arrivals dropped by about 3.4 percent in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2025, with visitors from the Middle East down by nearly a third, according to tourism ministry data.

Thailand expects about 33.5 million foreign tourists this year, up from nearly 33 million visitors last year, the government has said. – AFP



Tourists (centre) pose for photos in front of the Phra Dhammakaya Thep Mongkol, a seated Buddha statue, at the Wat Paknam Phasi Charoen Buddhist temple in Bangkok yesterday. – AFP

## Indonesian government critics targeted by lies, violence: Amnesty

JAKARTA – Indonesia's government is taking an "authoritarian" turn under President Prabowo Subianto, allowing disinformation to discredit critics and justify repression, Amnesty International said yesterday.

In a report titled "Building up Imaginary Enemies", the rights watchdog highlighted a trend of branding critics "foreign agents".

One of them, Indonesian rights activist Andrie Yunus, became the victim in March of an acid attack that left him blind in one eye.

Andrie, 27, has been a vocal critic of what many perceive as the military's expanding role in government, and was attacked shortly after recording a podcast on the topic.

Amnesty said its investigations found "a growing pattern in which Indonesian authorities – including the military – deploy online disinformation to target journalists, activists, academics and protesters in retaliation for their legitimate activism and expression".

It also alleged tech companies Meta, TikTok, X and YouTube "have allowed harmful disinformation to remain online".

The report said Prabowo and senior officials have repeatedly accused critics of being paid, manipulated or controlled by foreign

interests, claims then amplified on social media with posts branding people "foreign agents".

Online slurs sometimes preceded violent attacks such as the one on Andrie, said Amnesty.

"Authoritarian practices have accelerated in Indonesia under President Prabowo Subianto's government," an Amnesty press statement said.

"In the 18 months since Prabowo took power, online disinformation has emerged as a key tactic to systematically discredit government critics, shut down public debate and justify repression," it added.

And this while "social media companies sit back and let it happen".

In response, Meta said it had disrupted "adversarial" networks targeting Indonesian audiences and remained focused on "combating covert influence operations".

TikTok, for its part, said it regularly reviewed and strengthened its safety policies and enforcement.

Meta and TikTok pay AFP to fact-check posts with potentially false information.

The government did not reply to a request for comment.

Amnesty International regional researcher Chanatip Tatiyakaroonwong told AFP the report identified state actors involved in spreading

false "foreign agent" claims, including members of Prabowo's Gerindra party and at least one member of the presidential staff.

"Under international human rights law, the government has an obligation to refrain from spreading disinformation, to prevent state actors from doing so, and to stop and address such campaigns when they occur," added Chanatip.

"That failure to uphold the human rights of those targeted with these disinformation campaigns is what we are holding the government responsible for," he said.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), meanwhile, slammed a government proposal to amend the country's Human Rights Law to allow the authorities to determine who is a recognised human rights defender.

Last month, Human Rights Minister Natalius Pigail told state news agency Antara the government wanted to set up a team of assessors to determine whether someone can be classified as an activist.

He later backtracked and said the government would include a definition of human rights defenders in a revision of the law.

"Adopting such revisions would violate fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association and put rights defenders at greater risk," HRW said in a statement. – AFP



A man takes pictures of a Formula One replica car hanging at the main entrance of the shopping mall inside the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. – AFP

## Thai beer heir sacked after brother's abuse accusations

BANGKOK – One of Thailand's richest men dismissed his cousin from the Singha beer business empire yesterday, the company said, after days of controversy over allegations the man had sexually abused his own brother.

Environmental activist Siranudh Scott, a scion of the Bhirombhakdi family who control the beer brand ubiquitous in Thailand, posted an emotional video on his Facebook page this month accusing his elder brother of repeatedly abusing him in his teenage years.

"Everyone in my family knows it because they listened to the tape I recorded of his confession" but no one took action, he said, declaring that he no longer wanted to be referred to as a "Singha heir".

"I don't want to stay in a family that doesn't value me or have empathy for me," he added through tears. "I can't live with this kind of people."

The 29-year-old, whose father is Scottish, is a prominent and sometimes controversial marine conservationist, who founded a group called Sea You Strong active in the seas off southern Thailand.

His declarations prompted days of headlines in Thai media.

Siranudh's brother Sunit had been "dismissed" from all his positions, the conglomerate's parent company Boonrawd Brewery Company said in a statement.

The company "would like to express its deepest regret to Siranudh Scott for what happened", it said, adding it was cooperating with authorities in their investigations.

It was signed by CEO Bhurit Bhirombhakdi – the two men's cousin.

He also posted online a letter from Sunit in which the accused man said: "In order to ensure fairness for all parties, I hereby resign from my duties as an employee and executive... until the matter is clarified and conclusively proved."

Sunit previously denied the accusations of sexual abuse, but acknowledged roughhouse play between boys.

The Bhirombhakdi family are listed as Thailand's 15th richest by Forbes, which estimates their net worth at US\$1.75 billion.

As well as Singha Beer, the group's other interests include food manufacturing, hotels, power and property. – AFP

## Philippine Senate probes security after shots fired last week

MANILA – Security officers from the Philippine Senate are being investigated for firing their weapons without provocation as a senator wanted by the International Criminal Court sought refuge in the building, officials said yesterday.

Senator Ronald Dela Rosa briefly sought refuge in the Senate last week while asking the Philippine Supreme Court to stop an attempt by government agents to arrest him.

The fugitive senator, the former national police chief in the early years of Duterte's anti-drug campaign, barely escaped arrest before wild scenes erupted on May 13.

Shots were fired during the mayhem that sent senators scurrying into their offices for shelter.

Philippines authorities presented their initial findings into the incident at a public briefing yesterday, where Interior Secretary Juanito Victor Remulla identified Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Mao Aplasca as the person who fired the first shot.

Aplasca's shot outside the building prompted a government agent to fire a warning shot in return, he said.

"All evidence points that there was no attack on the Senate," Remulla said,

adding that government agents "never set foot" inside the Senate building.

Police Chief Jose Nartatez said Aplasca had been called to a police inquiry to have his gun tested but he had not yet complied.

CCTV footage subpoenaed by investigators from the Senate appeared to show him firing a rifle.

Aplasca is a former classmate of Dela Rosa and said in an interview with a local television that he had fired the first warning shot when he saw a group of armed men he thought were trying to enter the Senate.

Senate President Alan Peter Cayetano has also said security guards fired warning shots because it was feared the Senate had come under attack.

Nartatez said Dela Rosa possibly left the Senate last Wednesday in a vehicle registered to his ally Senator Robin Padilla to an unknown destination.

Dela Rosa is accused along with Duterte and others of the "crime against humanity of murder" for their roles in the deadly crackdown on illegal drugs.

Duterte was arrested last year and is awaiting trial by the ICC in The Hague. – AFP

## Pakistan court sentences man to death for killing teen influencer

ISLAMABAD – A Pakistani court sentenced a man to death yesterday for murdering a teenage influencer last year after she had repeatedly rejected his advances.

Sana Yousaf's murder in June drew nationwide condemnation and reignited debate over women's safety, after some online comments – alongside condolences – blamed her for her own death.

A judge announced to a cramped Islamabad courtroom yesterday afternoon that 22-year-old Umar Hayat was sentenced to death and fined US\$7,200, an AFP reporter saw.

"This verdict is a lesson for anyone who commits such acts, showing that they should never be repeated," Yousaf's father told journalists outside the courtroom, alongside her mother.

Hayat shot 17-year-old TikTok star Yousaf at her home in the capital after she repeatedly rejected him, according to police and the teenager's family.

Yousaf had millions of followers on social media, where she posted videos about food, fashion and skincare.

She also spoke openly about relationship problems, a topic still considered taboo in the Muslim majority country.

News of her killing triggered an outpouring of comments under her final post, a video celebrating her 17th birthday in which she blew out candles on a cake just days before her death.

Alongside condolence messages, some users blamed the teenager for her own murder, writing comments such as: "You reap what you sow" and "It's deserved, she was tarnishing Islam".

In her Instagram profile picture, she is smiling and holding sunflowers.

### Widespread violence

Surveillance footage shown during the investigation captured the killer fleeing the influencer's house with her phone.

The victim's mother and paternal aunt were eyewitnesses to the murder.

The 22-year-old confessed to the murder but later retracted his statement.



Parents of Pakistani TikTok influencer Sana Yousaf, who was killed for rejecting a man's proposal, address the media after a verdict outside the court in Islamabad, Pakistan yesterday. – AFP

Under Pakistan's legal system, the convicted man can still challenge the verdict in a higher court.

Women's rights activists, including some of Yousaf's friends, staged protests in Islamabad following her killing.

Violence against women remains

widespread in deeply conservative Pakistan, according to the country's Human Rights Commission, and attacks on women after rejecting men are not uncommon.

The case revived memories of Qandeel Baloch, dubbed Pakistan's "Kim Kardashian" and one of

the country's first breakout social media stars, who was murdered in 2016 after her online fame drew controversy.

In 2021, 27-year-old Noor Mukadam was beheaded by her Pakistani-American boyfriend, Zahir Jaffer, after rejecting his marriage proposal in a case that sparked nationwide outrage.

Jaffer was sentenced to death last year.

In 2016, law student Khadija Siddiqui survived being stabbed 23 times by a former boyfriend after refusing his advances.

TikTok is hugely popular in Pakistan, partly because its video format is accessible in a country with relatively low literacy levels.

The platform has also provided many women with both an audience and a source of income – rare opportunities in a country where fewer than a quarter of women participate in the formal economy.

"This is justice not only for Sana, but for society as a whole," Yousaf's father said, his eyes teary and his voice cracking. – AFP

## Chinese nationals arrested in Vietnam gold smuggling bust

HANOI – Authorities in Vietnam arrested five Chinese nationals accused of smuggling more than US\$45 million worth of gold in Hanoi, police said yesterday.

One Vietnamese national was also nabbed in the bust, which police said took down "the largest gold smuggling ring ever dismantled" in the capital.

The Vietnamese have a long tradition of holding their wealth in gold, which trades at a premium in the communist country due to strict controls on how it can be bought and sold.

The smuggling ring, believed to be led by a Chinese national, was caught "red-handed" with five kilograms of raw gold in Hanoi, the police statement said.

According to police, the men had smuggled the gold from Hong Kong, "disguising it among shipments of electronic equipment to evade detection by authorities".

Before selling it, the ring used chemicals to cleanse the gold, melting and casting the precious metal into bars for clients in Hanoi and neighbouring Bac Ninh province.

The Vietnamese accomplice – who accepted cryptocurrency in exchange for the gold and transferred it as instructed by the Chinese ringleader – told police he received up to 200 million dong (US\$7,600) per month as payment.

Police said the ring had traded approximately 300 kilograms of gold worth more than US\$45 million between March and their arrest on an unspecified date.

Vietnam does not have a national gold exchange, and domestic banks do not offer individuals access to online trading platforms for precious metals.

However, people can buy gold at private and state-owned jewellery shops. – AFP

## 13 killed, 25 injured in traffic accident in India

NEW DELHI – At least 13 people were killed and 25 others injured on Monday after a speeding container trailer crashed into a mini truck carrying a marriage party in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, police said yesterday.

The accident took place in the Dhanivari area of Palghar district, about 135 km north of Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra.

According to police, the impact of the collision was so severe that both vehicles overturned and suffered extensive damage.

Police have registered a case

and ordered an investigation into the accident.

India's state-run broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) said preliminary investigations suggest the mini truck was carrying passengers way beyond its capacity.

"Excessive speed, a narrow stretch of the road, and the mini truck driver losing control of the vehicle are suspected to be the primary causes behind the crash," the broadcaster said.

Deadly road accidents are common in India, often caused by overloading, bad condition of roads and reckless driving. – Xinhua

## Sri Lankan president vows to seek lasting peace in commemoration day speech

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said yesterday that his government's responsibility is to ensure the country never returns to war, while praising the armed forces for their role in disaster response and national emergencies.

Addressing the 17th National War Heroes' Commemoration Ceremony, which marks the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, Dissanayake said the armed forces had helped save lives during natural disasters, just as they had defended the country during war.

Dissanayake said all communities suffered the consequences of war, adding that opportunistic politicians and extremists had divided people of the same country.

He said the Sri Lankan government must guarantee the rights of people of all ethnic communities, and ensure that no



This handout photograph taken and released by the Sri Lanka's President Office yesterday shows Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (centre) laying a wreath for the fallen soldiers during the 17th anniversary of the National War Heroes Commemoration marking the end of the island's civil war, at the National War Heroes' Monument in Colombo. – AFP

other war will ever take place.

He added that the government is committed to strengthening the rule of law, protecting judicial

independence and creating a democratic society where all citizens have equal opportunity.

– Xinhua

## Millions more Afghans to return in 2026: UN report

KABUL – The United Nations said in a report yesterday that they are expecting almost three million Afghans to return to the country by the end of the year, more than half of whom will be women and children.

Since September 2023, 5.9 million Afghans have returned, mainly from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, accounting for around 10 to 12 percent of the population.

About 600,000 Afghans returned in the first four months of 2026 from Iran and Pakistan, the UN report said, adding there were "1.7 million estimated returns from Iran and 1.1 million from Pakistan

in the coming eight-month period".

Most of the Afghan returnees are skilled labourers who were born and raised in the neighbouring countries or have been away from their communities for years.

"They either have weak or no ties to their communities of origin," said Tajudeen Oyewale, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan.

Oyewale added that "over half of those returning are women and children" who are the most vulnerable in the country.

The UN and NGOs are calling for US\$100.7 million for immediate border response for lifesaving assistance at key official

crossing points with Iran and Pakistan.

"This figure only covers 40 per cent of the most vulnerable returnees, even though 70 per cent meet our vulnerability criteria," said Thamindri De Silva, Country Director of World Vision International.

However, according to the report, the reintegration response for the returnees requires US\$428.5 million.

Another report issued this week warned that humanitarian assistance had declined "from US\$1.62 billion in 2024 to US\$0.91 billion in 2025 – a 43.82 percent reduction". – AFP

## Israel's finance minister says ICC seeks arrest warrant against him



Israel's Finance Minister Bezalet Smotrich (centre) takes part in the Jerusalem Day parade at the Damascus Gate in the old city of Jerusalem last Thursday. Every year, thousands of Israelis, many of them religious Jews, march through Jerusalem and its annexed Old City, including in predominantly Palestinian neighbourhoods, waving Israeli flags, dancing and sometimes shouting slogans.

— AFP

JERUSALEM — Israel's far-right finance minister Bezalet Smotrich said yesterday that the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor has requested an arrest warrant against him, accusing the Palestinian Authority of pushing for the move.

Smotrich said he would retaliate by ordering the evacuation of the Palestinian Bedouin community of Khan al-Ahmar in the occupied West Bank.

"Last night I was informed that the criminal prosecutor of the antisemitic court in The Hague has filed a request for an international arrest warrant against me," Smotrich told a news conference broadcast on his X account Monday.

"As a sovereign and independent state, we do not accept hypocritical dictates from biased bodies that time and again take a stand against the State of Israel," he added, without disclosing the charges for which the warrant has been requested.

The ICC prosecutor's office said it was "unable to comment on media speculation or questions related to any alleged application for a warrant of arrest".

In November 2024, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant, to face accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity over Israel's actions during its war against Hamas in Gaza.

### 'Declaration of war'

"Immediately upon the conclusion of my remarks here, we will sign an order to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar," Smotrich said, calling the warrant request "a declaration of war".

More than 750 people live in the community of Khan al-Ahmar, around 10 kilometres east of Jerusalem's Old City in the central West Bank and surrounded by Israeli settlements.

The Palestinian Authority's Settlement and Wall Resistance Commission urged the international community to stop the move.

"Targeting Khan al-Ahmar is part of a long-term strategic settlement project... through which Israel seeks to create complete settlement contiguity that would separate the northern West Bank from its south," the commission's

minister, Muayad Shaaban, was quoted as saying.

Peace Now, an Israeli settlement watchdog, also denounced the move.

"The Minister of Expulsion and Annexation seeks to take revenge on The Hague and the international community at the expense of one of the most vulnerable communities," it said.

Khan al-Ahmar sits near land Israel plans to use for its controversial E1 development project that would facilitate settlement expansion in the area near Jerusalem.

Smotrich, who lives in a settlement himself, is a staunch proponent of Israel annexing the West Bank.

"Under this government, we see that for the first time they've approved the very sensitive and significant plan of E1, and they're going ahead with plans to annex that entire region," Lior Amihai, Peace Now's executive director, told AFP.

"In order for them to annex the entire region, they need to also expel the Palestinian communities from there, and Khan al-Ahmar is one of them," he added. — AFP

## Israel launches strikes across Lebanon, warns dozen towns to evacuate

BEIRUT — The Israeli military yesterday launched a series of strikes across Lebanon, particularly the south, while warning residents of a dozen towns to flee ahead of attacks despite an ongoing truce in the war with Hezbollah.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) and AFP photographers said the strikes targeted several areas in the Tyre district and Nabatieh province in the country's south.

The top two floors of a building in Maashuq in the Tyre district collapsed after an airstrike, according to AFP images. It also damaged neighbouring buildings and parked cars.

A strike on the same town a day prior destroyed a primary healthcare centre managed by the Hezbollah-linked Islamic Health Committee, the Lebanese health ministry said.

An airstrike yesterday on the Saray neighbourhood in Nabatieh, which includes shops, an old mosque, and traditional residential buildings, destroyed a large part of it. AFP images showed a plume of smoke rising from the targeted area.

The Israeli military had previously issued evacuation warnings for 12 Lebanese towns, 11 of them in the south and one in the eastern Bekaa area.

It later repeated the same warning. In a separate statement, the army

said it intercepted a drone from Lebanon.

Hezbollah meanwhile said it carried out several attacks against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon, in addition to targeting Iron Dome platforms in Jal Alam and Margaliot in northern Israel.

The Lebanese civil defence yesterday said it had lost contact with seven citizens after an Israeli incursion in the southern town of Rashaya al-Fukhar.

It said that Israeli forces later released four of them, while the other three remained "in Israeli captivity".

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 by firing rockets at Israel in support of its backer Iran.

Since the start of the ceasefire on April 17, Israel has continued to launch strikes, carry out demolitions and issue evacuation orders in south Lebanon, saying it is targeting the Iran-backed armed group.

It has also repeatedly issued evacuation warnings for dozens of towns, reaching places far from the border that were housing displaced people from other areas.

Israeli strikes on Lebanon have killed more than 3,000 people since March 2, according to Lebanese authorities.

The Israeli military says it has lost 20 soldiers and one civilian contractor in southern Lebanon since the war began. — AFP

## UN expert condemns 'torture' of Palestinian prisoners in Israel

GENEVA — A United Nations expert yesterday raised alarm over the alleged "torture" of Palestinian prisoners and "potentially unlawful deaths" in Israeli prisons since October 2023.

The comments come as Israel faces growing scrutiny over detention conditions following the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas inside Israel that sparked the Gaza war.

"Emergency measures introduced after 7 October 2023 exposed Palestinian detainees to torture, potentially unlawful deaths, incommunicado detention, and degrading conditions," said Alice Jill Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture.

Quoted in a UN statement seen by AFP, she argued the "number and cruelty of allegations" point to a "gross disregard by Israel of its duty to treat all detainees humanely".

Edwards said she had gathered information on 52 cases involving various forms of torture or ill-treatment, as well as 33 cases of sexual torture and other forms of sexual abuse.

Reported abuses include "severe beatings, stress positions, excessive restraints, electrocution, sleep deprivation, malnutrition and starvation" among many others.

She also expressed concern over reports of at least 94 deaths in custody since October 2023 that had not been investigated.

Autopsies in several cases revealed multiple rib fractures, skin haemorrhages and injuries to internal organs, including abdominal tears, she said.

"Behind every allegation is a human being who was wholly dependent on those exercising power over them," Edwards said, calling for "full, independent and transparent" investigations and accountability.

In a communication to Israeli authorities, she noted that none of the 1,680 complainants filed against Israeli intelligence services had led to indictments.

She urged Israel to review and revise its detention laws, policies and practices.

More than 9,000 Palestinians are currently held in Israeli jails, including 2,200 serving sentences.

Edwards said she had also launched a separate review into allegations of torture and other abuses by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other armed groups in Gaza, as well as by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. — AFP

## US-Nigeria airstrikes kill 175 IS fighters: Nigerian military

LAGOS — The Nigerian military said yesterday that joint airstrikes it launched with US forces at the weekend have killed 175 jihadists from the Islamic State (IS) group in Nigeria, including the group's global second-in-command.

US and Nigerian militaries killed Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, an IS leader described as the "most active terrorist" in the world, at a remote village in northeastern Nigeria last weekend.

"It will be recalled that the joint strikes started a few days ago. As of 19 May 2026, assessments indicate

that 175 ISIS militants have been eliminated from the battlefield," the Defence Headquarters said in a statement, using another name for the jihadists.

"The joint strikes have resulted in the destruction of ISIS checkpoints, weapons caches, logistical hubs, military equipment and financial networks used to sustain terrorist operations," it added.

As director of global operations for IS, the slain al-Minuki provided strategic guidance on media and financial operations and "the development and manufacturing of

weapons, explosives and drones", according to the Nigerian military and the US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Nigeria has long battled jihadist insurgents, including Boko Haram and regional offshoots of the IS organisation, primarily the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

West Africa has become the world's most active zone of Islamist militancy, according to a recent report by global conflict monitor ACLED, which showed that Islamic State activity in Africa hit a record high in the first quarter of 2026. — AFP

# US police probing deadly mosque shooting as hate crime

Zoe Meyers

SAN DIEGO – Police are investigating a shooting in the US state of California as a hate crime after a pair of teenage gunmen killed three people at a mosque complex.

Tearful women emerged from a centre set up to reunite families caught up in the shooting, and yellow police tape blocked access to the Islamic Centre of San Diego, where the victims were found on Monday.

Police said emergency response teams found the victims, all men, outside the sprawling complex, before later finding the shooters, aged 17 and 18, dead in a car from apparent self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

TV footage from a helicopter showed armed response teams gathered outside a building, with one unidentified person lying in a pool of blood.

“We are actively investigating this as a hate crime,” San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl told reporters. “There was definitely hate rhetoric that was involved.”

The Islamic centre describes itself on its website as the largest mosque in San Diego County, which is in southern California.

After a short period of lockdown when authorities advised area residents to stay inside, San Diego police announced that the threat at the centre had been “neutralised.”

“We received a call of an active shooter at the Islamic center. Within four minutes, officers arrived on scene and observed immediately three deceased victims out in front,” Wahl said.

“We immediately began to deploy with an active shooter



A Muslim woman speaks with a San Diego police officer following the deadly shooting at the Islamic Centre of San Diego in southern California, on Monday. The shooting at the largest mosque complex in San Diego killed three people, with two suspected teenage gunmen later found dead in a car from self-inflicted gunshot wounds, police said.

– AFP

response into the mosque and adjacent school,” he said, adding that police had received calls about more gunfire nearby, where a landscaper had been shot at but not hit.

## ‘Suicidal’ son

Police found a vehicle in the middle of the street a few blocks from the centre with the shooters dead inside.

“The suspects at this point appear to have died from self-inflicted gunshot wounds. There were no officers involved in firing their weapons,” Wahl said.

NBC identified the shooters as Cain Clark, 17, and Caleb Vazquez, 18, citing three law enforcement officials.

Wahl said a security guard at the Islamic centre was among the three victims, adding that his response had helped prevent a deadlier attack.

“His actions were heroic, and he undoubtedly saved lives today,” Wahl said.

The identities of the victims were not immediately clear.

Wahl said that the mother of one of the suspects had contacted police two hours before the attack and reported that her son was “suicidal”

and that several weapons and her vehicle were missing.

“She also said that her son was with a companion and that they were dressed in camo,” Wahl said.

“That is not consistent with what we would typically see from somebody that is suicidal.”

One of the shooters left a suicide note that contained writings about racial pride, and hate speech was scrawled on one of the weapons, CNN quoted unidentified law enforcement officials as saying.

## ‘Outrageous’

Initially, police deployed to an

area around a high school linked to one of the suspects, until they received a call of an active shooter at the Islamic centre.

The imam at the mosque, Taha Hassane, said that all the staff, teachers and children at the mosque’s school were safe.

“We have never experienced tragedy like this before. And at this moment all that I can say is, sending our prayers and standing in solidarity with all the families in our community here,” he said.

“It is extremely outrageous to target a place of worship,” the imam added.

US President Donald Trump said the shooting was a “terrible situation,” while New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the first Muslim mayor of a major American city, described the attack as “an apparent act of anti-Muslim violence.”

“Islamophobia endangers Muslim communities across this country,” he posted on X, adding that New York police are boosting deployments to mosques “out of an abundance of caution.”

Wahl, the police chief, said that, given the location of the attack, investigators were “considering this a hate crime until it’s not.”

California Governor Gavin Newsom expressed horror at the attack, saying: “Worshippers anywhere should not have to fear for their lives.”

“Hate has no place in California, and we will not tolerate acts of terror or intimidation against communities of faith,” he said on X, adding, “To the San Diego Muslim community: California stands with you.”

– AFP

## Spanish ex-PM Zapatero under investigation for influence peddling

Martin de Montvalon

MADRID – Spain’s former Socialist prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has been placed under investigation for influence peddling and crimes allegedly committed in connection with the bailout of a small airline, a court said yesterday.

The move adds to pressure on current Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, already weakened by corruption investigations involving family members and senior political allies.

Zapatero, who served as prime minister from 2004 to 2011, was not originally closely aligned with Sánchez but has in recent years become one of his top defenders.

He has been summoned to testify on June 2, and police have searched his offices and three unnamed companies, Spain’s top criminal court said in a statement.

Zapatero will be questioned as the “alleged head of a stable and hierarchical influence-peddling

structure” which notably “used opaque financial channels” to “conceal the origin and destination of funds” and obtain bribes, the National Audience said, citing the judge’s ruling.

The investigation centres on a 53-million-euro (US\$62 million) emergency loan granted in March 2021 to Plus Ultra, a minor Spanish airline that operated flights to Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela with a small fleet of Airbus A340 aircraft.

The bailout was approved under a government fund established to support strategic companies hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The airline’s eligibility for the rescue package drew criticism from opposition parties, which pointed to its limited operations and ties to Venezuelan business interests.

Spanish media reported that investigators are examining whether a consulting firm linked to an associate of Zapatero acted as an intermediary in financial

transactions under scrutiny, including alleged payments related to the bailout.

Authorities are also looking into possible commissions and financial flows connected to the case.

Plus Ultra, headquartered in Madrid, has several shareholders with links to Venezuela, a factor that has long fuelled political controversy surrounding the rescue. Zapatero has consistently denied ever having received any payments from Plus Ultra or having committed any wrongdoing.

“I want to reaffirm in the strongest possible terms that I have never carried out any dealings with any public administration or the public sector in relation to the bailout of Plus Ultra,” he said in a video sent to the media yesterday.

## ‘Degraded institutions’

While other Spanish prime ministers have been called to testify in corruption cases, this is the first time in Spain’s modern history that

a former premier has been placed under formal investigation.

The main opposition conservative People’s Party (PP) said Zapatero and Sánchez have both “degraded the institutions they represented” and “used their families to enrich themselves”.

Sánchez’s brother David is scheduled to stand trial for influence peddling, while his wife, Begoña Gómez, is under investigation in a separate corruption case.

The prime minister has dismissed these cases against his family as politically motivated.

Sánchez’s former right-hand man, former transport minister José Luis Abalos, is awaiting a verdict in his own corruption trial which wrapped up earlier this month.

Abalos, who helped propel Sánchez to power in 2018, is accused of earning kickbacks for the irregular awarding of contracts for face masks, which were in high demand and short supply as the COVID-19 pandemic started.

## Regional poll defeats

The corruption cases have dented support for Sanchez’s Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) ahead of a national election expected next year.

The party has suffered a string of heavy losses in regional elections including its former stronghold Andalusia where it achieved its worst-ever result on Sunday.

Zapatero had campaigned in favour of the party’s candidate there, Sánchez’s former finance minister María Jesús Montero.

The PSOE defended Zapatero – who made several social reforms including the legalisation of same-sex marriage while in office – and suggested the probe was politically motivated.

Zapatero’s time in office was “marked by an ambitious programme to extend rights, equality, and social protection. The right and far right have never forgiven him for these advances,” the party said in a statement. – AFP

# Mango scion released on bail after arrest over father's death

Rosa Sulleiro

BARCELONA – The eldest son of Spanish clothing empire Mango's founder Isak Andic was released yesterday after posting one million euros (US\$1.16 million) bail following his arrest as part of a murder inquiry into his father's 2024 death.

After being detained by police yesterday morning (local time) and taken to court in handcuffs for questioning, Jonathan Andic left the courthouse in Martorell in northeastern Spain, where he was accompanied by his lawyers, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

He did not answer questions from journalists.

The 45-year-old was ordered to surrender his passport, appear weekly before the court, and was banned from leaving the country, the court said in a statement, adding that the case was being "investigated as a charge of homicide".

Jonathan was alone with his 71-year-old billionaire father when the clothing empire founder plunged to his death in the Montserrat mountains near Barcelona on December 14, 2024.

At the time of Isak's death, authorities said he had fallen from a height near the Salnitre caves in Collbato, an area marked by steep drops and ravines.

Investigators initially treated the death as an accident, with early findings suggesting Isak, one of Spain's richest men, may have slipped.

A judge closed the case in January 2025 after finding no evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

However, investigators with Catalonia's regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra, along with prosecutors reopened the investigation in October 2025 after citing inconsistencies in Jonathan's testimony, according to media reports.

## Family tensions

Spanish newspaper *El País* reported at the time that authorities had seized Jonathan Andic's phone shortly after the death.

It also cited testimony from Isak Andic's partner, professional golfer



Catalan regional police officers (Mossos d'Esquadra) escort Jonathan Andic, the son of Isak Andic, founder of Spanish fashion brand Mango, as he arrives at a court in Martorell, near Barcelona, following his arrest yesterday. – AFP

Estefania Knuth, describing the at times tense relations between father and son.

According to the newspaper, the two had clashed over the younger Andic's role in the company.

Isak reportedly handed more operational responsibility to Jonathan in 2014, but then resumed tighter control a year later when Mango experienced business difficulties.

Knuth was also reportedly involved in a financial dispute with Isak's three children over the Mango founder's will.

Authorities have released few details about the investigation, which remains under judicial secrecy, Catalonia's High Court said yesterday.

Jonathan Andic has denied any responsibility for his father's death and has maintained that the fall was accidental.

A statement from the family said they had "total" confidence in Jonathan's innocence, adding that "there is no and will not be any legitimate evidence against him".

Jonathan began his professional career in Mango in 2005 after studying audiovisual communication in the United States and business in Spain.

He began to manage the Mango Man line two years later and was the vice-chairman of Mango's board at the time of his father's death.

"If you are clear about where you

want to go and keep moving forward, you will end up achieving your goals," Jonathan Andic, who rarely gives interviews, said in a 2023 Mango promotional video posted on YouTube.

## US\$4.5 billion fortune

Born in Istanbul, Isak moved with his family to Barcelona from Turkey as a teenager in the late 1960s.

He opened his first Mango shop on the Paseo de Gracia, Barcelona's famous shopping street, in 1984 with the help of his older brother Nahman. It was hugely successful.

His Mango brand quickly mushroomed across Spain and has become one of the world's leading fashion groups, with about 2,850 stores worldwide.

The company has a presence in more than 120 markets, with more than 16,400 employees worldwide, according to its website.

In December 2023, Isak transferred five percent of his company for the first time to a third party – his right-hand man, Toni Ruiz, the group's CEO and its current leader.

Last October, Ruiz and the other two executors of Isak's estate issued a statement praising the legacy of what they called a "visionary entrepreneur", and said they were convinced of Jonathan's innocence.

At the time of his death, Forbes estimated Isak's fortune at US\$4.5 billion. – AFP

# Cuba warns of 'bloodbath' if US attacks; Washington adds sanctions

Lisandra Cots and Jordane Bertrand

HAVANA – Cuba's leader warned on Monday of a "bloodbath" in the event of an American attack, while the US Treasury sanctioned Cuba's main intelligence agency and top leaders as tensions spiked between the arch-foes.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel stressed Cuba's right to defend itself a day after US news site Axios reported that Havana had obtained over 300 military drones from Russia and Iran and is mulling using them against US targets.

The report, which quoted US intelligence officials, came amid growing speculation that the United States is weighing military action to topple Cuba's communist government.

Axios quoted unnamed US officials as saying that Havana was considering drone strikes on the US base at Guantánamo Bay in eastern Cuba, on US military vessels and possibly even Florida.

Writing on X, Díaz-Canel repeated that Cuba "poses no threat" to the United States or any other country and warned that a US attack would "trigger a bloodbath with incalculable consequences."

He did not directly address Cuba's alleged stockpiling of attack drones but said the island had "the absolute and legitimate right to defend itself against a military onslaught."

Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations struck a similarly defiant note.

"If someone tried to invade Cuba, Cuba will fight back, no doubt about it," Ernesto Soberón Guzmán told AFP in New York.

"In the 60s, they [the US] tried to invade Cuba, and they were defeated. Of course, everybody can say this is a different situation. Yes, it is. But the will of the people of Cuba has not changed," he added.

## Adding pressure

Washington on Monday ramped up pressure on the Caribbean island nation by announcing sanctions on its intelligence agency and nine Cuban nationals, including the country's ministers for communications, energy and justice.

Several top Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) officials and at least three generals were also among those sanctioned, according to a statement from the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

The United States has heaped pressure on Cuba since January, with President Donald Trump musing about overthrowing the country's leadership, as US forces did in Venezuela that month.

Washington cut off one of Cuba's last economic lifelines by halting oil shipments from Venezuela, its main fuel supplier, and threatening tariffs on any other country that attempted to make up the shortfall.

Trump's oil blockade has exacerbated a severe humanitarian and energy crisis in Cuba, marked by ever more frequent blackouts.

The Cuban government has accused Washington of trying to create a pretext for a military intervention against its arch foe after first trying to "strangle" Cuba's economy with a crippling fuel blockade.

The Axios report came days after CIA Director John Ratcliffe visited Havana for negotiations.

It also comes amid US media reports that the Trump administration is seeking to indict Raúl Castro, the 94-year-old brother of late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, as part of its pressure campaign.

Havana says the oil blockade has caused the country to run out of diesel and fuel oil needed to power the generators that supplement the electricity production of its dilapidated power plants.

On Monday, the island received a new shipment of humanitarian aid from Mexico – its fifth from Mexico's left-wing government since February.

Unlike the previous shipments, which were carried by the Mexican navy, Monday's aid consignment was transported by a merchant ship, sailing under a Panamanian flag, AFP journalists observed.

The vessel is carrying 1,700 tonnes of aid.

Cuba's minister for the food industry, Alberto López, said that it included powdered milk and beans for children and the elderly. – AFP

# Difficult to tally Latin American heat-related deaths: report

BRASÍLIA – Heat waves and other extreme weather ravaged Latin America and the Caribbean last year, but tallying the death toll from these events is a near-impossible task, a report published on Monday warned.

Scientists say that recurring heat waves are a clear marker of global warming and that these heat waves are set to become more frequent, longer and more intense.

A report presented by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in the Brazilian capital noted torrential rains, flooding and landslides in several countries, including Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela in 2025.

October's Hurricane Melissa

devastated Jamaica and incurred losses of more than 40 percent of the Caribbean island's GDP, according to the United Nations agency.

Eighty-five percent of Mexican territory was hit by drought, while Andean glaciers, which provide water to some 90 million people, melted at an accelerated rate.

The report also highlighted heat waves across the Americas, with temperatures exceeding 45C in some areas.

Such extreme heat poses "an increasing public health burden," it said.

Most countries do not systematically publish data on heat-related deaths, it added.

This data is usually inferred from analyses of excess mortality, according to the WMO.

The organisation estimates around 13,000 heat-related deaths in Latin America every year, based on an average drawn from 17 countries between 2012 and 2021.

But this figure is almost certainly an underestimate, the report warned.

WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said the report was a "call to action."

"It calls on us to strengthen observations, invest in services, close early warning gaps, and ensure that climate information reaches those who need it most," Saulo said in a statement. – AFP



People queue to buy bread on a street in Havana on Monday. – AFP

## Pep Guardiola: Catalan genius who changed football



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (left) stands with assistant coach Mikel Arteta, as he holds the winner's trophy as the team celebrates victory after the English FA Cup final against Watford at Wembley Stadium in London, on May 18, 2019.

— AFP

John Weaver

LONDON — Pep Guardiola will leave Manchester City with an unparalleled legacy as a manager who has reshaped English football during a decade of relentless success.

The Catalan is reportedly in the final days of his Etihad reign, though there has been no official comment from the club, who still have an outside chance of sealing a domestic treble.

Guardiola, who has a year left on his contract, has wearily fended off questions over his future for months but it is widely reported that Sunday's match against Aston Villa will be his last.

The 55-year-old arrived in Manchester in 2016 as the most sought-after coach in world football following golden stints at Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

During his 10 years at the Etihad he has turned City into a ruthless winning machine in the world's richest league, backed by the bottomless pockets of the club's Abu Dhabi ownership.

Guardiola has collected 20 trophies including six Premier League titles, bagging an unprecedented four in a row from 2021 to 2024.

In 2023 he won the first Champions League trophy in City's history - the third of his career - in addition to the Premier League and FA Cup, matching the treble he won at Barcelona.

In doing so City became just the second team in English football history to complete the feat after Manchester United in 1999, ruthlessly underlining the power shift in their own city.

Guardiola's rivalry with Jurgen Klopp, whose Liverpool side pushed City to even greater heights with their own swashbuckling brand of "heavy-metal football", was one of the high points of the Premier League era.

On Saturday he lifted a third FA Cup at Wembley and is still clinging to the hope that Arsenal will slip up in the Premier League title race.

### Legacy

But Guardiola's legacy is about so much more than silverware.

His brand of slick, possession-based football and insistence on building from the back, even under

pressure, is now a core part of the English game from grassroots through to the elite level.

And he has been a ceaseless innovator, famously winning the Premier League in 2022 without a recognised centre-forward and using players in unfamiliar and hybrid roles.

Guardiola has also imparted his philosophy to a new generation of coaches.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was given his first senior coaching post as the Catalan's assistant at City and Enzo Maresca, tipped to be his successor, was previously a member of his coaching staff.

Former City captain Vincent Kompany is flourishing in charge of Bayern Munich while newly appointed Chelsea boss Xabi Alonso worked under him at Bayern.

Such has been Guardiola's influence on the English game that he was even linked briefly with taking over as manager of the national team.

The City boss remains a hyperactive figure on the touchline, living every moment of every match.

Off the pitch he is passionately outspoken on political issues, backing Catalan independence and voicing his support for Palestinian children.

He says he wants to use his position to "speak up to be a better society".

Guardiola's great mentor and inspiration is late Dutch great Johan Cruyff, who built Barcelona's "Dream Team", which featured locally raised defensive midfielder Guardiola.

The City boss himself shies away from the comparison.

"Nobody is like Johan," he said. "It's a big compliment you say that, but nobody is like him, the charisma, personality."

"He changed the mentality of two clubs - Ajax and Barcelona - as a player and as a manager with a charisma that's impossible to replicate."

Guardiola may not want to compare himself to Cruyff but the former midfielder is already among a select group of all-time coaching greats.

City's season-ending open-top bus parade on Monday may turn into a farewell celebration for the greatest manager of his generation.

— AFP

## Neuer set for return to Germany World Cup squad: reports



BERLIN — Veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is set for a surprise return to Germany's World Cup squad as the number one option two years after announcing his international retirement, German media reported yesterday.

German tabloid *Bild* claimed coach Julian Nagelsmann had informed players, including prospective number one Oliver Baumann, that the 40-year-old would be included in the World Cup squad, which will be announced tomorrow.

In an appearance on German TV on Saturday, Nagelsmann refused to

address Sky Germany reports that the 2014 World Cup winner would return.

The German football federation (DFB) also refused to comment when contacted by AFP sport subsidiary SID yesterday.

Neuer retired from Germany duty after Euro 2024, having played 124 games at international level. On Friday, he extended his contract at club side Bayern Munich by a year until 2027.

Nagelsmann had consistently backed Baumann as the number one option for this summer's tournament, with Marc-Andre ter Stegen suffer-

ing a series of injury complaints.

While Neuer has impressed this season, winning the man of the match award in Bayern's 2-1 win at Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals, injuries have been an increasing concern.

Neuer missed several matches this season with a calf issue in the same leg he broke in a skiing accident in 2022.

He was subbed off after an hour with a recurrence of the same injury in Bayern's final Bundesliga match of the season on Saturday and is in doubt for this week's German Cup final with Stuttgart. — AFP

## Ronaldo, 41, leads Portugal into his 6<sup>th</sup> World Cup



LISBON — Veteran Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo will lead his country into the 2026 World Cup this summer after coach Roberto Martinez named the 41-year-old in his squad yesterday.

The former Real Madrid and Manchester United star, now at Saudi Arabian side Al Nassr, is set to appear at a record sixth World Cup.

Portugal and Ronaldo, the all-time leading men's international goalscorer with 143 goals, have never won the competition.

Ronaldo could face former Barcelona rival Lionel Messi, who is also set to play at a sixth World Cup after leading Argentina to glory four years ago in Qatar.

The Portuguese forward avoided a three-match ban despite being sent off against the Republic of Ireland in their last qualifying match for an elbow.

Spanish coach Martinez selected a 26-man squad with no major surprises, including Ronaldo's Al Nassr team-mate Joao Felix, and also

named goalkeeper Ricardo Velho as an extra player in the group.

Paris Saint-Germain stars Vitinha, Joao Neves, Nuno Mendes and Goncalo Ramos are also included in a strong squad, along with Manchester United playmaker Bruno Fernandes and a contingent from Manchester City, including Bernardo Silva.

Martinez said he would not need to manage five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo in a special way because of his age.

"In my experience, at a World Cup, a player doesn't follow the pattern of club form, age-related performance or anything like that," Martinez told reporters.

"The focus is our group. All of them are focussed, they're prepared for the demands of a World Cup and we just need to manage day by day."

Ronaldo said last year that this World Cup would be his last.

He was left in tears last weekend after defeat by Gamba Osaka in the AFC Champions League Two final,

but Martinez said an emotionally draining season would not affect him this summer.

"I think that coming into the national team set-up brings new energy and allows you to completely switch off from what happened during the season," said the coach.

Martinez confirmed Velho was the fourth goalkeeper and he would only be involved if another stopper was injured and could be replaced in the squad.

The coach also said late striker Diogo Jota, who died in a car crash in July 2025, was with the squad in spirit.

"The spirit, strength and example of Diogo Jota is our plus one," Martinez added.

In the run-up to the tournament Portugal will face Chile and Nigeria in friendlies, before their World Cup campaign begins against DR Congo on June 17.

Portugal will also face Uzbekistan and Colombia in Group K on June 23 and 27, respectively. — AFP

## Emery focused on Villa glory, not crown of Europa League 'king'



ISTANBUL — Aston Villa manager Unai Emery has insisted he is not the "king" of the Europa League despite bidding to win the competition for a fifth time when his side face Freiburg in today's final in Istanbul.

Emery has overseen a revival in the 1982 European champions' fortunes, guiding the Premier League club to the Conference League semi-finals in 2024 and the quarter-finals of last season's Champions League.

Villa are now just one game away from lifting their first major trophy in 30 years.

Spanish boss Emery is considered something of a Europa League specialist after winning the competition three times with Sevilla and once while in charge of Villarreal.

"I am not a king in this competition," Emery said at his pre-match press conference yesterday.

"I need to win tomorrow with the players we have now, with Aston Villa now, with the opponent we face tomorrow. So it's a new way, a new moment and hopefully a new era."

"I don't want to speak a lot about the things we did before."

"Now, this year, and the matches we played before in the Conference League or in the Champions League, and they are showing the capacity to play at a high level."

Emery has been a transformative figure at Villa since succeeding Steven Gerrard as manager in 2022, turning a relegation-threatened side into one that has now qualified for the Champions League in two of the last three seasons.

Villa are on the cusp of a first major trophy since winning the 1996 League Cup and Emery has urged

his side, who failed to win any of their opening six matches in all competitions this season, to relish occasions such as today's final.

"This is a process. A process (for) how we could achieve, building the team and our structure," he said.

"Now it's a new experience we will have tomorrow. It's very important how we manage our emotions and we've done it for a lot of matches and there are a lot of emotions."

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

— AFP/MPD



Aston Villa's English strikers Ollie Watkins (centre right), Tyrone Mings (centre left) and teammates attend a training session on the eve of the UEFA Europa League final against SC Freiburg at the Tupras stadium in Istanbul yesterday. — AFP

## 2-time champion Alcaraz withdraws from Wimbledon with wrist injury

### Tennis

MADRID – Carlos Alcaraz's hopes of regaining his Wimbledon title have been dashed with the two-time champion announcing yesterday he is withdrawing as he recovers from a wrist injury.

"My recovery is going well and I'm feeling much better, but unfortunately I'm still not ready to play, I am obliged to withdraw from both Queen's and Wimbledon," said Spaniard Alcaraz, who lost to Jannik Sinner in last year's final in the All England Club.

"These are two really special tournaments for me and I'll miss them a lot. We'll keep working to come back as soon as possible."

Alcaraz sustained the injury during the first round of the Barcelona Open last month and subsequently pulled out of tournaments in Madrid and Rome and then Roland Garros, where he is the reigning two-time champion.

The world number two became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam in January with his

triumph at the Australian Open. The 23-year-old holds a 22-3 record this season and also won a title in Doha.

Wimbledon will be only the third Grand Slam that Alcaraz has missed since making his main draw debut at the 2021 Australian Open. The Spaniard withdrew from the 2023 edition in Melbourne with a hamstring injury.

### Sinner rivalry

Alcaraz's wrist injury has stopped him continuing his exciting rivalry with Italian world number one Sinner, 24, who is firm favourite to triumph in Paris and London.

He lost top spot following his defeat by Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final on April 12.

The seven-time Grand Slam winner triumphed at Roland Garros in 2024 and 2025. He saved three championship points against Sinner last year in the longest French Open final in history.

The Italian, who has never won the French Open, may be able to capitalise on Alcaraz's absence. This year's tournament runs from

May 24 to June 7.

Alcaraz won his first Wimbledon trophy in 2023, defeating seven-time champion Novak Djokovic in the final and successfully defended his title against the Serb the following year.

This year's Wimbledon championship runs from June 29 to July 12.

"It's sad news for all of us, me being a competitor you want to play against the best players in the world and he's definitely the best player on this surface," Sinner had said after Alcaraz's withdrawal from the French Open.

"Being that young, like he is and like I am, we need to look at our bodies first before worse things (happen)."

Last month, Alcaraz insisted that he would not risk a premature return.

"I'd rather come back maybe a bit later, but in great shape, than come back quickly and risk making this injury worse," he explained.

"I have a long career ahead of me, so I'm not afraid to miss what I have to miss in order to recover as well as possible." – AFP



Panchaya Channo of Thailand celebrates with the trophy after beating Reanne Evans of England at the 2026 World Women's Snooker Championship in Dongguan, Guangdong Province, yesterday. – Xinhua

## England sweat on skipper Sciver-Brunt's fitness before T20 Women's World Cup



LONDON – England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt could miss next month's T20 World Cup after the all-rounder was ruled out of her side's warm-up series against New Zealand and India.

Sciver-Brunt tore her left calf while playing for the Blaze in domestic cricket earlier this month and was subsequently ruled out of the three-match one-day international series against New Zealand.

England had hoped she would be ready to return for T20 matches against New Zealand, with that series starting in Derby today, but a new scan has seen her ruled out of all three games, as well as the subsequent campaign against India.

Tournament hosts England begin their T20 World Cup against Sri Lanka at Edgbaston on June 12, leaving Sciver-Brunt in a race against time to lead the side as they go in search of a first major trophy since lifting the 2017 50-over World Cup on home soil.

In addition to her leadership skills, Sciver-Brunt has long been a key player for England, both as the team's leading batter and a medium-pace bowler and they

are a significantly weaker side without the 33-year-old.

Spin-bowling all-rounder Charlie Dean is set to continue deputising as skipper in her absence.

"England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt has been ruled out of both Vitality IT20 series against New Zealand and India," said an England and Wales Cricket Board statement issued yesterday.

"Following a scan on Monday, England Women have confirmed a longer period of rehabilitation is needed to enable Sciver-Brunt to play a full part in the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup."

Sciver-Brunt, speaking to Sky Sports News on Monday, said: "It has been frustrating to be left on the sidelines but hopefully soon I can get back out there. We have got a great leadership group that are in constant communication on and off the pitch."

"I have left it in good hands and I wanted Charlie to do things in her own way."

Another experienced campaigner, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, will also miss the three T20s against New Zealand due to the birth of her first child. – AFP



Gold medal winner Barnokhon Sayfullaeva of Uzbekistan competes during the women's high jump final at the 1st Asian Jumping Championships in Chongqing, on Monday. – Xinhua

## Sport in brief

### China has strong start on first day at 2026 Malaysia Masters

#### Badminton

KUALA LUMPUR – Shuttlers of Team China delivered a strong performance on Day 1 of the 2026 Malaysia Masters here yesterday, with several players advancing across multiple events.

Men's singles world junior champion Hu Zhean made an impressive opening, outplaying Su Li Yang of Chinese Taipei 21-12, 23-21 in the first qualifying match before knocking out Malaysia's Lim Ming Hong 21-13, 21-10, while his compatriot Zhu Xuanchen overcame Muhamad Yusuf of Indonesia 19-21, 21-16, 21-19 and Malaysia's Eugene Ewe Eon 21-18, 20-22, 22-20.

Men's doubles duo Huang Di and Liu Yang outplayed Chen Cheng Kuan and Liu Kuang Heng of Chinese Taipei 22-20, 21-11, while their teammates Xie Haonan and Zeng Weihang eased past Thailand's Chaloepon Charoenkitamorn and Worrapol Thongsa-nga 21-13, 21-9.

Women's doubles pair Chen Fanshutian and Luo Xumin outclassed Polina Buhrova and Yevheniia Kantemir of Ukraine 21-9, 21-15, while their compatriots Luo Yi and Wang Tingge knocked out Turkiye's Bengisu Ercetin and Nazlican Inci 21-8, 21-15.

Among China's many successes also came a couple of setbacks. In the men's singles, Dong Tianyao lost out to South Korea's Yoo Tae-bin in their qualifying match. Meanwhile, Chinese men's singles shuttler Shi Yuqi withdrew from the tournament before the competition began.

The 2026 Malaysia Masters runs until Sunday. – Xinhua

### Scotland's McGuigan gets full-time England rugby coaching role

#### Rugby

LONDON – Byron McGuigan will join England coach Steve Borthwick's staff on a full-time basis in time for the start of rugby union's new Nations Championship, it was announced yesterday.

The Namibia-born, South Africa-

raised McGuigan first began working with England during last year's tour of Argentina and the United States, while continuing in his role of defence coach with Prem club Sale.

But from next month his England position will be made permanent, with the former Scotland centre's responsibilities to include collision skills, the aerial contest and aiding the back three.

"Byron is an excellent addition to our coaching group," Borthwick said.

"Since arriving with us last summer, he has made a strong impact through his detailed understanding of the game and the energy he brings."

He added: "We're excited about the contribution he will continue to make."

England play Nations Championship matches against world champions South Africa, Fiji and Argentina in July.

They are looking look to recover from their worst Six Nations that saw them finish fifth, with England managing just a solitary win in their tournament opener against Wales before losing four games in a row.

But an ensuing Rugby Football Union review of a dismal campaign ended with Borthwick backed to coach England at next year's World Cup in Australia.

On Monday, former England captain Borthwick named his first squad since the review, selecting South Africa-born Benhard Janse van Rensburg for the first time in anticipation of his qualification for England on residency grounds from July 8.

Janse van Rensburg's inclusion meant there was no room in the 42-man squad for Bath centres Ollie Lawrence and Max Ojomoh. – AFP

### Ganna wins time-trial in Giro shake-up

#### Cycling

MASSA, Italy – Italy's Filippo Ganna won the stage 10 time-trial at the Giro d'Italia yesterday, as overnight leader Afonso Eulalio clung on to the pink jersey.

Eulalio now leads race favourite Jonas Vingegaard by just 27 seconds, a lead that stood at around five minutes when he won last

week's rain-lashed stage five.

Eulalio had led by over two minutes and looked set to lose the pink yesterday before rallying in the latter half of the long time trial.

Ineos rider Thymen Arensman had a great day and climbed to third at 1min 57 while Felix Gall dropped to fourth at 2min 24sec. Australian Ben O'Connor climbed to fifth at 2min 48.

The potentially decisive stage was held on a flat 42km coastal run between Viareggio and Massa on the Tuscan coast.

A picture-postcard run, the same route often features on the Giro warm-up race the Tirreno-Adriatico, and it featured two long, straight stretches meaning power rather than technique was the order of the day.

While Ganna's win was expected, so was the shake up in the overall with Jai Hindley and Felix Gall losing time in the run for the overall.

Stage 11 is a hilly affair with no real shake-up expected and Eulalio tipped to keep the overall lead as far as the weekend mountain stages.

– AFP

# Blockbuster 'Hope' shows S Korea's growing movie muscle

CANNES – Acclaimed director Na Hong-jin has unveiled South Korea's biggest budget film ever: a blood-splattered sci-fi thriller featuring killer extraterrestrials played by real-life couple Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander.

"Hope" by Na, whose low-budget horror movie "The Wailing" became a huge hit in his home country, was able to give free rein to his dark imagination in this gory tale of alien invasion.

"It's the most expensive film in the history of Korean cinema," Na told AFP in an interview at the Cannes Film Festival where the film premiered on Sunday.

"It's a film that really required a very, very large budget because of the special effects, the design, the actors."

Despite having a genre-defying concept that was hard to sell initially – it skips between thriller, sci-fi, horror and comedy – he received backing from South Korea's Plus M Entertainment and a budget of around

30 million euros (US\$35 million).

The cost of "Hope" underlines the increasing resources available to South Korean directors whose hit films such as the quadruple Oscar-winning "Parasite", as well as TV series like "Squid Game" have turned the home of KPop music into a global entertainment centre.

Reviews for "Hope" were broadly positive, with *Screen* magazine calling it "a thunderously entertaining genre mash-up" while *The Hollywood Reporter* said it had "instant cult classic written all over it".

But others such as *IndieWire* slammed the quality of the special effects – suggesting the budget was "not enough" for Na's grand ambitions – while its run-time of 160 minutes was described as "over long" by *Variety*.

Although married acting couple Fassbender and Vikander, stars of films from "12 Years a Slave" to "Ex Machina", are listed on the film's cast, many fans might struggle to



(From left to right) German-Irish actor Michael Fassbender, Canadian actress Taylor Russell, South Korean director and screenwriter Na Hong-Jin and Swedish actress Alicia Vikander pose during a photocall of the film "Hope" at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France on Monday. – AFP

recognise them.

Their acting has been transformed by special effects, with all the recognisable lead roles performed by bankable Korean stars including Hwang Jung-min, as well as Hyeon from "Squid Game".

## Korean wave

The all-action film, full of bodily fluids and gunfire, revolves around

a clash between the residents of a remote town close to the frontier between South and North Korea and terrifying visitors from another planet.

With its themes of conflict and the incompetence of local officials, Na said he had "the wars that we know at the moment and the political situation that we had" at the time in his mind as he was writing the screenplay.

"Hope", intended as the first film in a series, is one of 22 films competing for the prestigious Palme d'Or prize for best film in Cannes.

It is the first by Na in 10 years since "The Wailing", which also focused on a remote location struggling with a mystery arrival.

The Cannes jury this year is headed by a South Korean director for the first time, Park Chan-wook, the maker of arthouse classics such as "Oldboy" and "The Handmaiden".

"Korea is playing a role as one of the central hubs of the film world, and I believe this is a movement befitting the time," he told AFP last week.

"It makes me think of a lot of the [Korean] predecessors who were truly outstanding but never had the opportunity to be recognised internationally," he added.

Park insisted that he would not favour his compatriot, Na.

"Some even joked that I might go out of my way to be harsher on a Korean film, because it wouldn't look good if I appeared to be favouring it," he told AFP. "I intend to judge everything as fairly and objectively as possible." – AFP

## Harry Styles fans to splash over US\$1.3 billion on London gigs: Barclays

LONDON – Harry Styles' dozen concerts in London this summer will see fans spend more than £1.0 billion (US\$1.3 billion) combined on tickets and costs including accommodation and travel, Barclays forecast yesterday.

The British bank said the figure, which is similar to estimates it gave for Taylor Swift's UK tour in 2024 and the Oasis UK reunion last year, highlighted "the rise of concert tourism".

"Harry Styles' Wembley residency is set to deliver a significant boost to London," Barclays' head of hospitality and leisure, Rich Robinson, said in a statement.

"It also underlines consumers' growing appetite for memorable experiences, as people increasingly prioritise events that feel personal, meaningful and worth travelling for."

Fan spending across the 12

Styles concerts at the London stadium is set to total £1.06 billion, or £981 per person, despite inflationary pressures.

Alongside buying tickets, those attending are due to spend on average hundreds of pounds on food, drinks, outfits and official merchandise, Barclays estimated.

Styles kicked off his "Together, Together" tour in Amsterdam on Saturday ahead of performing across the globe, including in New York, São Paulo and Sydney.

The 32-year-old Briton burst onto the pop scene at the age of 16 thanks to the X-factor talent show that led him to front boy band One Direction.

The artist's solo career has cemented his status as one of the world's biggest pop stars, thanks to smash hits "Watermelon Sugar", "Sign of the Times" and "As It Was". – AFP



British singer Harry Styles (centre) performs on stage during the BRIT Awards 2026 at the Co-op Live arena, in Manchester on February 28. A decade after One Direction, Harry Styles has cemented his status as one of the world's biggest pop stars, blending magnetic stagecraft with a modern vision of masculinity, his fans say. – AFP

## French govt urges women to report rape in star's assault probes

PARIS – A French government spokeswoman yesterday encouraged women to speak out about sexual violence, "even decades later," as she addressed mounting allegations of rape and assault targeting popular singer and actor Patrick Bruel.

Bruel, 67, is a major figure in French pop culture, with multiple top-selling albums to his name, and has appeared in more than 40 films.

He is the latest in a string of French film and music celebrities accused of sexual assault.

"We must continue to bring into public discourse extremely clear messages that encourage women to speak out, even decades later," government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon told the France 2 broadcaster, referring to claims of rape targeting the French star.

"We must all work towards a political, media, and judicial system that allows women who have been victims of sexist and sexual violence to speak out, to say it publicly, and to be heard by the justice system," she added.

"I listen to them," she added. "And then it is up to the justice system to establish the truth of the facts."

Bruel faces several probes in France and Belgium and more are expected to be announced. He denies all the accusations.

On Monday, prosecutors said they had reopened an investigation targeting Bruel over an alleged rape in 2015.

His accuser, Ophélie Fajfer, was 19 years old at the time of the alleged rape, her lawyer Myriam Guedj Benayoun told the BFMTV broadcaster.

Fajfer – then a young composer – had gone to Bruel's holiday

residence in southern France in hopes of receiving professional advice from the singer, she said.

The Nanterre prosecutor's office in the western suburbs of Paris is already handling three investigations into rape allegations against Bruel involving incidents that allegedly took place in 1997, 2000 and 2008.

A probe has also been opened

in Belgium following a complaint regarding an alleged sexual assault.

Two women also filed another complaint last week for rape and sexual assault, which should lead to a new investigation.

"I have never forced a woman," Bruel wrote on Instagram on Sunday.

"And if I may have hurt anyone, I sincerely regret it." – AFP



French singer and actor Patrick Bruel looks on after speaking during a rally organised by the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF) in support of Israeli hostages and in the memory of the victims of the October 7, 2023 terrorist attack by Hamas, in front of the Trocadero in Paris, on October 17, 2025. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 14°C~23°C	Manila 25°C~35°C	New York 16°C~34°C	Lisbon 15°C~29°C
Shanghai 20°C~27°C	Bangkok 26°C~34°C	London 11°C~20°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~23°C
Hong Kong 24°C~28°C	Tokyo 19°C~29°C	Frankfurt 10°C~21°C	Luanda 21°C~26°C
Taipei 23°C~33°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 10°C~19°C	Maputo 15°C~26°C
Guangzhou 23°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~34°C	Paris 10°C~20°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 17°C~27°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow 17°C~31°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 21°C~29°C	Seoul 15°C~20°C	Las Vegas 17°C~30°C	Praia 19°C~28°C
Xi'an 17°C~28°C	Sydney 12°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~21°C	Bissau 21°C~35°C



**Not so impressed**

A dog dressed as US model Hailey Bieber, poses during the 2026 Pet Gala at CINEPLAY in New York, on Monday. The highly anticipated annual canine fashion event, created by pet couturier Anthony Rubio, showcases dogs in elaborate, custom-made outfits inspired by the year's Met Gala. — AFP

**Best hat topper**

This undated file photo shows Liang Yu, a 25-year-old from Guizhou Province, attending a local culinary workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand. — Xinhua

**Ominous glow**

A resident waters his garden as the Sandy Fire burns in the hills close to a residential area in Simi Valley, California, on Monday. — AFP



**Never grow up!**

Public transport bus (locally known as matatu) crews pass the time with games amidst their grounded mini-buses due to a nationwide strike by transporters now in its second day over fuel price hikes in Nairobi, Kenya yesterday. — AFP

**Aligning planets**

This photo taken yesterday shows the planet of Venus next to the crescent Moon in the twilight sky over Jiamusi, Heilongjiang Province. — Xinhua



**Yummy treats**

Dog pastries are seen on display at "Casa del Doggo" dog cafe in Paris on May 7. — AFP